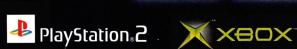


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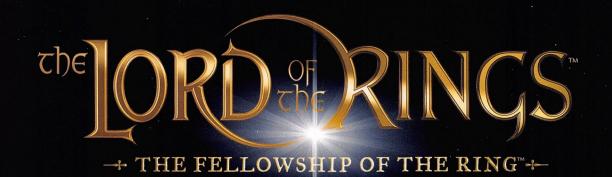














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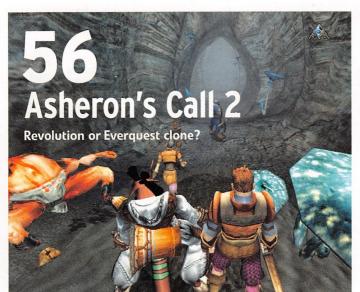


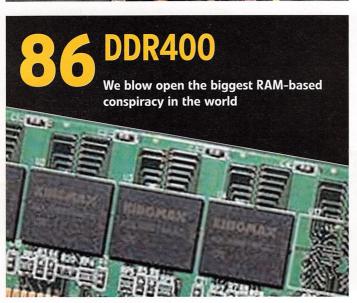
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or a DVD!

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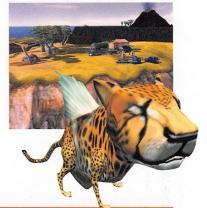
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NOT-MUCH-DIFFERENCE ENGINES



If you flip to page 52 this month you'll notice an extremely glowing review of Ironstorm, the latest allaction 3D FPS from... well actually it's a debut PC title from little-known developer 4X Studios. This in itself is not necessarily particularly unusual but that the game looks and plays excellently is a little more against the normal grain of things. However, most surprising of all is that Ironstorm uses a proprietary engine, not a licensed Epic,

Monolith or id creation. PHOENIX 3D looks as good as Quake 3, runs well on lower end systems and is clearly capable of handling very complex scripted events.

Ironstorm serves to remind us of the curious situation we currently have with our games. Not only do we only have a limited number of genres to choose from - RTS, FPS, RPG and a handful of hybrids - when you sit down and think about it, we only have a number of technologies to choose from as well. Quake 3, Unreal, Unreal Tournament, Lithtech and a very few others make up all the 3D engines currently on the market. Anything released using a proprietary engine was, up until Ironstorm, pretty much guaranteed to be crap. It's as if everyone is so afraid of the skills of id, Epic and Monolith that they just can't bring themselves to put in the R&D time to develop decent alternative engines.

It's kind of like the situation we find ourselves with Microsoft Windows - for gamers the OS is pretty damn good, and since no one in their right minds would develop outside of it (except for the odd Linux port) the whole situation sort of snowballs until it becomes impossible to develop outside of it, so in the end every single game in the whole world runs DirectX and nothing else (OpenGL clients don't count - they're like Italian sports cars: the performance is great but maintenance is pure hell).

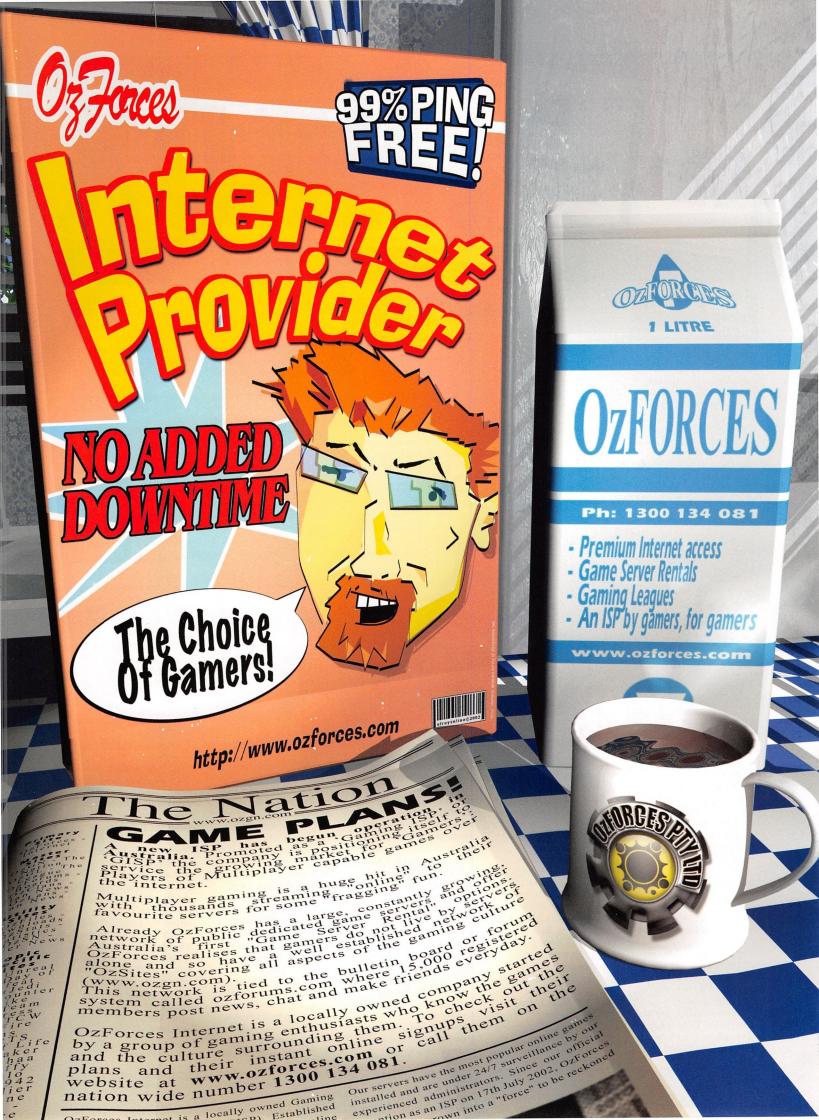
Naturally that every game runs under DirectX isn't necessarily a bad thing - it lets us get more games more quickly for a start. But does every game have to be built using id or Epic technology? We've seen with Ironstorm a game with an excellent engine that hasn't been through the creative filter of John Carmack. The differences between PHOENIX 3D and Quake 3 are subtle, but refreshing. And it's part of what makes Ironstorm such a great game.

At the moment, if we want to see a quantum leap in 3D technology we have to sit around and wait for id or Epic to graciously bestow it upon us. But why should we have to depend on these guys, just because we gave them a stupid amount of money more than five years ago? Why can't we get a shooter as good as Ironstorm three times a year?

Hopefully, with PHOENIX 3D now out in the market we will not only see other games using this technology, but other technologies emerge as other developers realise id and Epic aren't great 3D developers by divine decree, but merely through practice (and through an impressive amount of natural talent too, to be fair).

In other news, it's time to officially welcome PCPP's new Art Director. Shari Davies joins us from other publications in the Next stable to bring her own particular style and sensibility to the pages of your favourite mag. And you know what? I rather think we benefit from a feminine touch.







Wants us to mod his PC...

About 2 weeks ago I chose to subscribe to PCPP but it was a close choice. If you included some modding articles then PCPP would always win hands down. I realise your mag is mainly focused on games but what about more heavy peripheral reviews or even some modding gear? I myself recently purchased some rounded IDE cables and a blue cathode light and are

about to get into some heavy chopping of my case. I wanna see some how-to guides and best things to do with all the gear I just spent a few hundred dollars on.

HoboLord

Well then you'll be happy to know we're currently building a frankly awesome Matrix-modded PC, so you should anxiously await PCPP#82 (on sale December 18) where we'll take you step-by-step through how we made it.

Also hates online cheaters

Just a word on your Editorial; I cannot agree more with you about those antisocial idiots who wreck games with their wild accusations. I have played many games online before ADSL was prevalent and 56k was great. In that time I've meant many fair minded people who enjoy the give and take of online

play and don't bring it down to juvenile levels with silly accusations. Recently I was actually accused of cheating when in reality my opponent was extremely lagged. This just shows how many people now just throw out accusations rather than thinking "Am I lagged?" or "Am I shooting straight?" This is extremely disappointing since

it certainly wrecks a good game. I wonder if this does say something about the prevalence of cheating in some games though? Games such as Diablo which was and probably still is plagued with ways to cheat including the basic duping to the more complex never dying methods you may be more inclined to think someone is cheating than just playing very well. This sort of anti-social behaviour isn't just limited to computer games though, you see it in sports as well. Bad winners and even worse losers. People who don't know the meaning of the words "Good Game".

Alkatr0z

Indeed you've identified a very important knock-on effect of the online cheating plague. What happens if you do indeed just happen to be a good player who wins a lot? Gratifying to you, but a source of screaming hatred for others who, sadly, are

probably quite justified in thinking you a cheat since the last six guys who just whupped them like that WERE cheating. It's clear than the onus is now on the operators of gaming servers to develop and implement more effective anti-cheating measures, just as much as the onus is on us to STOP CHEATING GODDAMNIT! How can we fight the Establishment if we waste all our energy fighting ourselves?

Thinks CDPP buyers are ripped off

Lately on PC PowerPlay there has been lots of great stuff on the DVD discs. I don't have a DVD-ROM and I don't want one because I've got one for the TV so it would be a waste of money. Can you please make sure that Stronghold: Crusader and those Starcraft mods are put on the normal CDs



LETTER OF THE MONTH: Games too short for this Fishmonger...

I work in a quiet little fish shop owned by my dad and when business is quiet I sit on my computer and play my little heart out. I am not complaining coz who wouldn't want to get paid for playing computer games at work all day? The only thing wrong with this is that I go through, like two or three of the newer games in a week. To date the only game that hasn't taken like, two or three days to whoop a lot o' tushy is Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind - it ROCKS! They really went to town on this one didn't they? There's the perfect blend of gameplay, graphics, storyline and most of all GAME TIME! I have been playing it for four weeks now and I still

haven't finished it. Anyhoo, my point is why don't developers make the games as long or as challenging they use to? All of the new games these days are focusing on graphics and money rather than storyline, gameplay or length. I say bring back the good old games like Ultima 7 and Return to Zork - now there were two kickass games that took a long time and I enjoyed myself along the way. So I say let's leave the games with next-gen graphics alone for a while and go back to the roots of gaming. And for God's sake can't they make a game about a fishmonger? I mean I am waiting to hear from someone...

Dean Fink

My only real regret Dean is that I don't have a copy of Trophy Bass Fishing 3 to reward you for the excellent points you've raised in your letter. I guess you'll just have to make do with Neverwinter Nights, at least it'll take you a whole bunch of hours to finish.

And now to the response; the issue of the length of games is a bone of considerable contention between myself and Jere, as Jere maintains he has some kind of life beyond gaming and wants to be able to do his chores, watch TV, talk to his wife and yet somehow also finish his favourite games. I, on the other hand, am less concerned with

finishing a game and more concerned with the idea that I get a hell of a lot of entertainment for the ridiculous sum of \$80-\$90.

There is definitely a sweet spot when it comes to game length. I recently took Aliens vs Predator 2 for a spin again and found it much too short, but Half-Life remains an excellent length. On the other hand, shamefully I never managed to chew all the way through Fallout 2 (although, ironically Jere did finish Ultima 7 - so much for his 'life') as every time I completed a quest, eight more seemed to open up in front of me.

As to why so many modern games are so short, well we could get

all cynical and say that's big business trying to get you to spend your \$90 every month instead of twice a year. Or we could point the finger at developers exhausted from spending three years creating a new 3D technology and them jamming a game into it in six months. Or we could maybe admit one important point: we're just a lot better at games than we used to be. We know what to expect, we know how to deal with it, and we're more prepared to put in the big hours to get the job done. It's not just games that

have evolved...

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as they are both great games. Perhaps you could have made more space on issue #79's CD by removing useless demos like Syberia (sorry to all Syberia fans - if there are any), and patches for OLD games like Giants and Emperor: Battle for Dune. Do your loval readers with CD drives justice, and give us the best on the CD too. I have been a loyal reader even before DVD players were remotely popular and would like to see good ol' CD drive owners get what they deserve.

Frank

We are always very concerned about what goes on our CD and on creating a perfect balance between endless shooters, endless sports games and endless weird crap that nevertheless a massive proportion of readers seem to want. You should be aware though, that while the DVD gets every major demo released every month, space is a premium on the CD and we tend to stick to readers requests. So in the case of Syberia, this was something that you, the readers, wanted, Also, there will be lean months, where no manner of Paul Noone's dredging of the Internet and meeting black-ops couriers on windswept midnight beaches will result in anything more than two or three good demos.

And, let's not forget, the DVD edition of PCPP is the premium product, that's why we charge you more for it. We're confident that in the long run, everyone will be better off with a DVD drive, and we're just trying to encourage that by offering a massive disc to plug into it, every month.

Unhappy with Tech Section

When I buy the mag on a monthly basis, I always go to the hardware section first, and lately I have noticed that the hardware section in the mag has been going downhill for 2-3 issues running now. The reviews for hardware are good, but not much of a comparison is happening anymore. I've noticed you are still benchmarking with Quake 3 Arena. the UT2003 full version will be released very soon here, and was wondering if the mag is going to benchmark with that instead. The reason I ask is because it uses more technology than what the mag is currently using to benchmark. Also on a lighter topic, I loved the review for "The Thing" (PCPP#79) cause it brought back so many memories, and because of the review I'm thinking of getting it.

Terry Greenacre

Well Terry if only all our problems could be solved as simply as yours: firstly, expect to see more comparative tech reviews soon. We've been giving them a rest for the last few months because so much new technology has been released and we've had to dedicate the pages to explaining it!

As for our bench marking, yes we will be testing videocards and

other relevant hardware using UT2003 as of the January 2003 issue (PCPP#82) so expect framerate scores to take a dive, but become a lot more meaningful. Even I was starting to have trouble trying to decide between two cards running Q3A at 250fps and 285fps respectively. The only question now is how long UT2003 will last as our benchmarking tool of choice before it gets superseded by Doom 3...

Issues with game ratings

I know this is covered ground, but the censorship of games is Figure D! Anybody can buy anything! For example, I went to my nearest Video Ezy and asked if I could rent Dirty Harry, and because I am only 15, the Dirt Minions said "No!" but this is the warped bit, I goes down to my local game shop, and buy not one, not two, but 3 "restriced" MA15+ games. Sure, it set me back \$150, but it was worth it. (The games were Duke Nukem 3D, GTA3 and Kingpin). It's crazy. The advisory on videos means the world, but on games!? It's just a pretty sticker. it's so that my 9 1/2 year-old cousin in WA can buy GTA3 for the PS2, without an adult. Sad world, huh? Aircow76

The bizarre thing though is that every now and then specific EB outlets or places like David Jones will suddenly have a massive crackdown on under-aged 'naughty' game buying and demand elaborate ID checks even from the likes of me, despite being sixfour, bearded and having



FROM THE FORUMS

Continuing the debate sparked in the Editorial of PCPP#79. Cheating online is bad, mmkay?

Date Posted: Oct/13/2002 12:21 PM

I was playing Warcraft III PVK online (a little mod I made, fantastic) with strangers and someone decided that they where losing. Their whole team was dead except them so they typed "whosyourdaddy" and they became invincible. Now I thought that cheats did not work online but they do! Now this cheater thrashed us all because every time he attacked someone they died! What a little biatch. The other guys wanted to kill him. We were gonna send him a virus when the little bastardo showed up in another game and we all allied together and whooped his ass with some peasants and peons. Now he dares not show his face on Kali or he will be shot down by fellow gamers.

I have one thing to say to online cheaters out there: You RUINED Counter-Strike and you're not gonna ruin Warcraft III so fark off... and one more thing, hacks and trainers are also cheating. That bloody wallhack for CS ruined my games

Mad Yugo, Skaarj

Date Posted: Oct/13/2002 1:07 PM

I understand how u feel, it annoys me because by cheating it takes away the whole fun and skill of the game, and when they do it online it takes everyone's fun away. Just because they can't handle the difficulty and go crying to their mums whenever the lose or die, I mean seriously GROW UP!!!!

Toxic Potato, Monkey

Date Posted: Oct/13/2002 2:57 PM

I know, there is only one thing worse than waiting for the CS patch download to finally complete. And that's realising that you are playing with a bunch of cheaters.

Wookies_Unite, Tiefling

Date Posted: Oct/13/2002 7:10 PM DON'T TALK ABOUT CS... PATCHES! ARGH! THE PAIN!

Mad_Yugo, Skaarj

Date Posted: Oct/13/2002 9:56 PM

Yes online cheating is bad, but other than the time I had a play around cheatless in a US hacking server I have only experienced 2/3 cheaters in CS in the last few months. CS is not bad at all. Valve has gotten its act together and most people just don't bother cheating anymore. It's okay to hack and cheat online if you are doing so on a hacking server. Simple, otherwise you can lick some poo or something suitably bad.

the_jonesy, Guardian

Date Posted: Oct/14/2002 1:18 PM

I don't know about 'Camper'-Strike, sure I've played it and heard about wallhacks, aimbots and all that sort of thing. But for me, the game that had the most cheating in it was the original Jedi Knight. Anyone who says Game "X" has more cheating than Jedi Knight, clearly hasn't played it online before. According to the Worms e-book of Psychology, cheaters are tortured folk who log on to take out some of that built-up rage on innocent people, if they did it in real life, or even at a LAN, they would get their head punched in, that's why they stick to the anonymity of the Internet.

Worms, Avatar

PCPP business cards. The whole MA15+ Restricted rating is kind of difficult to police anyway, because how does a 15 year-old prove his or her age? On the other hand, it does makes for amusing moments at the local cinema, watching some tiny little dude in trendy (short) pants attempt to bluster his way into a matinee showing of American Pie 2. The

simple solution for games is an R18+ rating for titles that need it, but for some reason progress on the creation of this rating has all but fossilised.

Finally though, I must note that if you're 15 then of course Generic Game Shop is going to sell you games restricted to 15 and above. But keep giving those Dirt Minions plenty of stick anyway, Aircow, God knows they deserve it.



"Absolutely flawless.
The in-game atmosphere is fantastic."

Action Trip

"Arx Fatalis succeeds where others have failed."
Overall Score: 8 (out of 10)

GamersHell July 2002

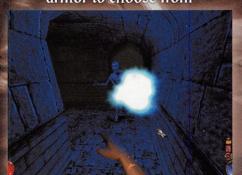
"Everything in Arx Fatalis, beginning with the clever dungeon design, the exciting story or the challenging puzzles makes it the most intelligent RPG these days!"

RPGDot

Unique hand-cast magic system with over 50 rune-based spells



Many different weapons and armor to choose from



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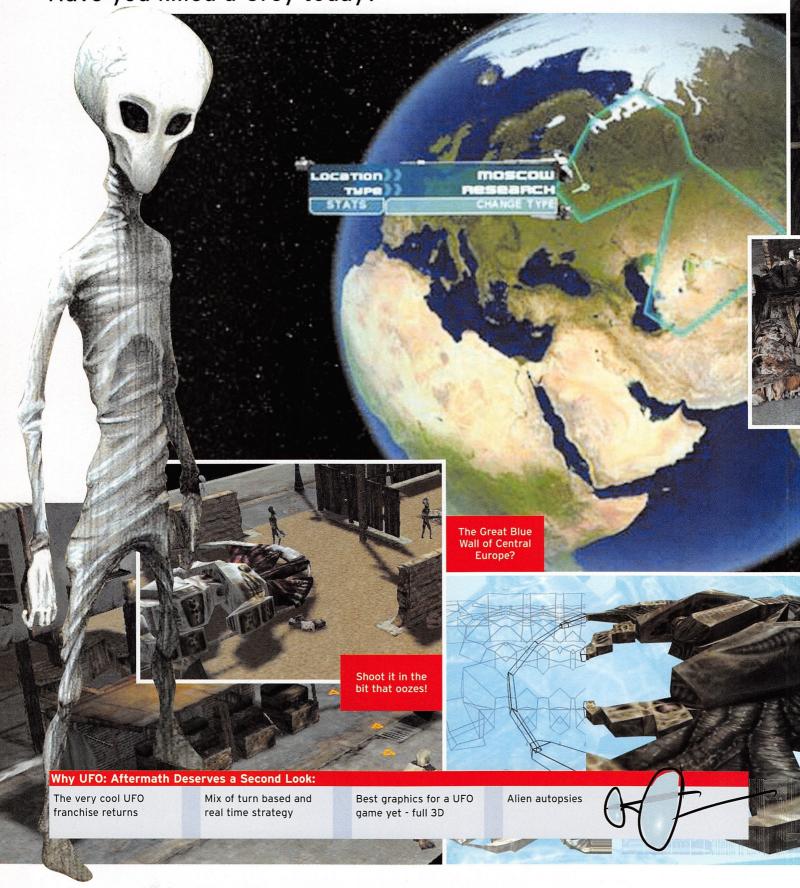




UFO: Aftermath

Developer: Altar Entertainment ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: First Quarter 2003

Have you killed a Grey today?





the original franchise and also significantly tarnished the fine UFO name. It's therefore good news for UFO fans that Aftermath returns to the core competency of the franchise and once again squads, guns and tactical combat are the prime ingredients to the game.

There are some significant changes however. Firstly, the X-COM team are no more. According to snippets of information about the new story line, a giant spacecraft approaches the Earth and begins to release great clouds of spores into the upper atmosphere. Having reached critical mass in the skies, the spores begin to rain down, and over the course of several days, all the streets and bodies of water become clogged, smothering people in their homes, and burying animals in the wild. During the "Nightfall", as it would come to be called, most of the higher life forms on the earth were wiped out. This it would seem became the fate of our beloved X-COM team.

Our planet in despair, your new team is nothing more than a rag-tag bunch of survivors out to save the Earth and secure their own future. Quite a nice touch, the use of vigilante civilians allows for the

integration of deeper RPG elements as your team gains skills and abilities to further the cause of humanity.

Once again two types of play element are used in UFOA. First there's the strategic game where you have to manage

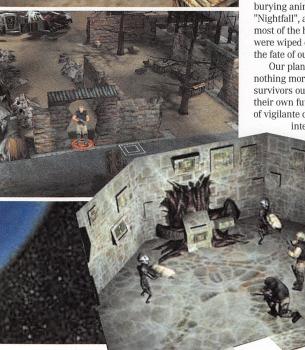
bases (Research, military or Biomass repulsion) around the world and the strategy lies in the balance of each base type. The tactical

game is very much in the vein of X-COM: Apocalypse where combat is a mix of real time and turn based combat. Anyone familiar with combat from the Baldur's Gate series will feel right at home. Essentially, you can pause the game at your convenience to give your squad orders and then un-pause to resume the action. It's an excellent compromise that allows for turn based purists and RTS fans to equally enjoy the game how they want to play it.

Putting it all together is a brand new 3D engine that has been developed from scratch and is set to intensify the UFO experience. Most impressively, there are no preset maps or levels in X-COM, but rather, like the original, each level is randomly generated from a series of 3D building blocks. The obvious advantage being that each mission features a different level.

A new 3D engine, the return to all the playability of the original and politically incorrect aliens make for a release worth waiting for. There had just better be fields to set on fire; I have a strange need to see Greys run screaming from them once again.

Jere Lawrence

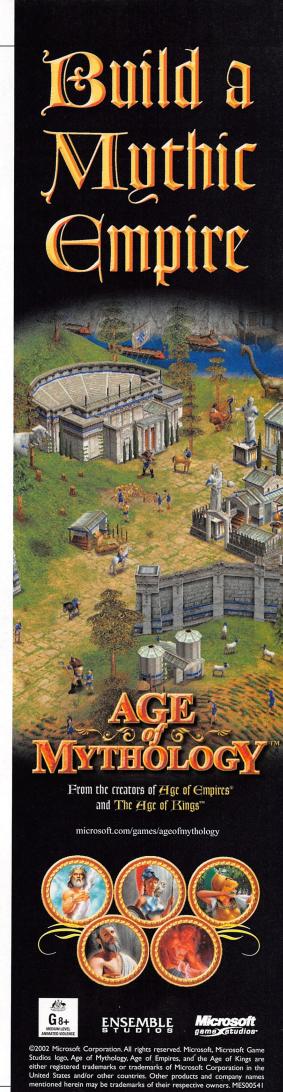


or those that can remember, an extremely successful game, and indeed franchise for Mythos Games was UFO: Enemy Unknown. Published by Microprose way back in 1994, to us oldies, it seems almost yesterday that we were setting fires to fields causing scores of evil greys to flee into the welcoming gunfire of well placed troops. How awesome it is that Altar, the new owners of the UFO franchise will be taking us back to the core competency of the UFO games - evil aliens

One of the more amusing aspects of the UFO games was the X-file style paranoia associated with aliens. Far from the "we're all friends of the universe" approach found in much Science Fiction, the aliens from UFO were mean vicious sons of whatevers that attempted to kill, maim and abduct the earth's civilisations into submission. Enter the X-COM team who rocked up to show them how to rumble human style. Well, that was until X-COM: Interceptor, a space

shooter that did nothing to appeal to fans of

and squad based combat.



XIII

BAM

Developer: Ubisoft ■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Distributor: Ubisoft ■ Due: March 2003

Do you feel unlucky punk?



Why XIII Deserves a Second Look:

Unique visual style using cel-shading and comicbook captions Clever mix of high-action shooter and cerebral sneak-em-up All the goodness of NOLF without being a shameless clone Use guards as human shields! That'll teach those Russkie dogs!



he last time we trusted Ubi Soft to bring us a game created from a successful French comic-book series, we ended up with Largo Winch (PCPP#79) where too much badly rendered sex was barely enough. So it's with suspicious eyes that we regard XIII (by which they of course mean 13), a secret-agent action romp partly in the vein of No One Lives Forever, and partly in the vein of Hitman.

Naturally the first thing you'll want to know is what the deal is with the graphics. XIII uses cel-shading, a particular rendering method that gives the characters and the environment the appearance of an animated cartoon. Instead of using complex textures on each object, the game just uses an environment map and a 1-dimensional lightmap to created the celshaded effect. This makes for a very visually distinct experience, albeit one that we haven't often seen on the PC.

Still a comic at heart

Like all good spy-thriller plots, XIII begins with the player waking up on a deserted beach, with no idea who he is but possessed nevertheless of an uncanny ability with all sorts of weapons. A quick walk reveals the beach to be part of an island, and that the island in turn is infested with ne'r-do-wells bent on ending the player's confused life.

The game essentially will be a shooter, but with a healthy dose of stealth-em-up elements. Also, unlike Largo Winch, XIII doesn't forget or attempt to transcend its

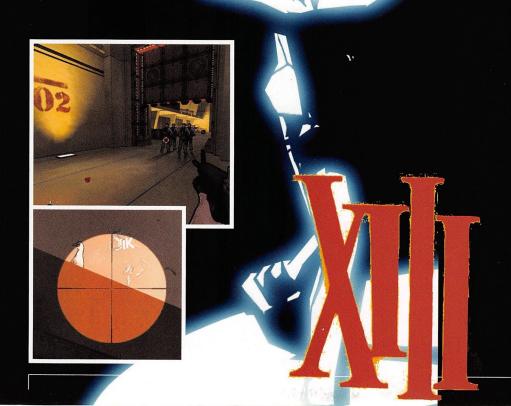
comic book roots. Events in the game world will be literally captioned in true comic style - explosions will have a BADADOOM! float above them, and enemies will sport comical exclamation points or question marks when reacting to the player. You might think this a kind of cheesy device but in practice it works very well, and at the very least it sets XIII distinctly apart from the current king of 1960s spy-action FPS games, NOLF2.

Human shields

Extra features promised for the final game include an ability to use a guard as a human shield, limiting the player to one-handed weapons but providing vital cover. The comic captioning will also reveal footsteps - a player spotting a "tap tap" floating from around a corner can prepare a stealthy ambush and avoid raising the alarm.

It remains to be seen if XIII's gameplay can outshine its visuals, or whether this will be a game that you just love to look at. Either way, we're certainly looking forward to it.

Anthony Fordham



Follow a Legend



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NSEMBLE STORY

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GAMEN ENS

HEADLINES: Marvel comics multiplayer game ■ Tarantino's Kill Bill flick game ■ Game whiz sells skills ■ Greece still for ban ■ Acclaim promotion: natural selection at work ■ Alien abduction game mysteriously developing



Academics Take on Mean Spirit of St Louis

aming has copped a lot of negative press in the past few years. It seems every incident involving youth and violence - particularly when firearms are in the picture - is linked to an excessive indulgence in violent gaming, with Counter-Strike and Doom favourite targets.

Continuous 'scientific' reports that show a link between violent gaming and violent behaviour have prompted a St. Louis court to issue an ordinance that restricts children from playing violent video games.

Just prove the decision wasn't part of an alarmist fad, the court recently upheld the decision after hearing from a psychologist that as little as 10 to 15 minutes of playing could produce violent behaviour and that computer games "provided a complete learning environment for aggression."

In response to this academics from around the world developed, signed and submitted a brief that challenges the validity of the thinking behind the decision.

There have been many inconclusive studies on the effects of videogame violence, and what makes this brief so interesting is the number and wide range of qualifications and disciplines of the academics who have lent their support to the brief.

RYTE SIZE

PROJECT Y NO MORE

Westka Interactive has closed up shop. The developers of Unreal-engine-based Project Y filed for insolvency in July but have been trying to save their main project. Unfortunately, its efforts were in vain. It also looks like Star Wars Galaxies has been delayed to well into 2003 - so people looking for their sci-fi fix might have to wait.

These academics include the Professor of Cultural Education at the University of London; the Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at Massachusetts; head of the School of Humanities and Professor of Screen Studies at Flinders University in Adelaide as well as historians, psychologists, cultural theorists and media experts from around the world.

Thirty-three researchers in all signed the brief declaring that there was no empirical evidence that violent computer games incited violent behaviour. Beyond that, they stated that most studies gave a null result.

The brief also points to the fact that while games playing is on the way up, youth violence is on the way down - and it hasn't been this low for 15 years.

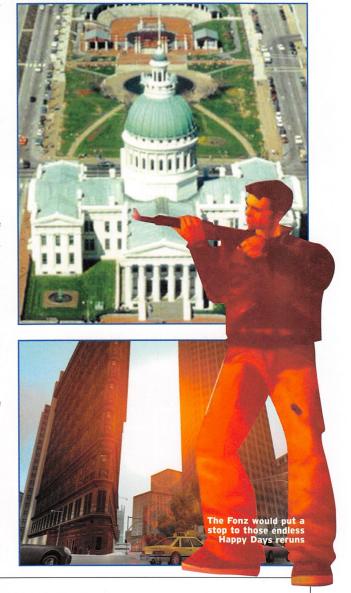
It goes on to argue that in many of the studies showing a link between gaming and violence, results had been skewed by ignoring negative results, by very loose definitions of violence (including the breaking of balloons) or comparing behaviour after watching an action film clip and then a boat in a canal.

Right before the conclusion of the brief, games researcher Celia Pearce says: "Most of the alarmism about violence is based on a profound misunderstanding about the social and emotional function of games.

"Games allow people who are midway between childhood and adulthood to engage in fantasies of power to compensate for their own feelings of personal powerlessness. This role-playing function is important for children of all ages."

So maybe we're all not bound to meet up in the Australian prison system just because we play games.

The brief was composed by the Free Expression Policy Project which is a group that provides empirical research and advises government on policy decisions. It can be found in full here: http://www.fepproject.org/courtbriefs/stlouis.html#occasional



MARVELLOUS

X-Men, Spiderman, Daredevil, Blade, Hulk Together Again

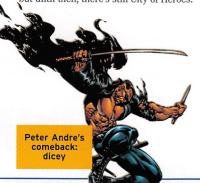
fter the success of superhero movies such as Blade and Spiderman, as well as more than 40 years in the comics biz, Marvel have signed a deal which will bring the Marvel-verse online.

Yep, a Marvel massively multiplayer game is coming. Vivendi Universal Publishing has signed the 10-year deal to develop and publish the online game. The terms of the deal give Vivendi access to Marvel's stable of over 4700 super beings.

The press release states that some fans like to "live and breath their favourite characters and now they will be able to do that 24 hours a day." This leaves it uncertain whether players will make their own characters or play one of the thousands Marvel has created. This would be cool except that you'd be much more likely to end up with Porcupine than

Wolverine (think how much money they could make auctioning off the old Canucklehead or Spiderman personas).

Fans shouldn't hold their breath because the Marvel MMORGP isn't due until 2005, but until then, there's still City of Heroes.

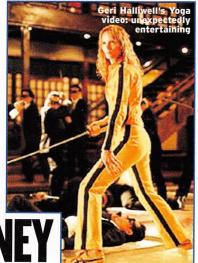


TARANTINO GETS GAMEY

Kill Bill Game Coming

uring Tarantino's next film, Kill Bill, it was revealed that Uma Thurman had just wrapped a scene where she takes on 75 ninjas in one fight. Tarantino is paying homage to Hong Kong fantasy action and he's going to town. And Vivendi is right behind him with the game of the film.

Who wouldn't want to see the game? It's all set for development at Black Label Games (that's Vivendi's mature game content publishing arm). Word is that Quentin is eager to have input into the game, offering detailed advice and giving developers access to key scenes from the movie to use as they will. Kill Bill is looking more interesting than the blunt, rhyming name would suggest.



TIME IS MONEY

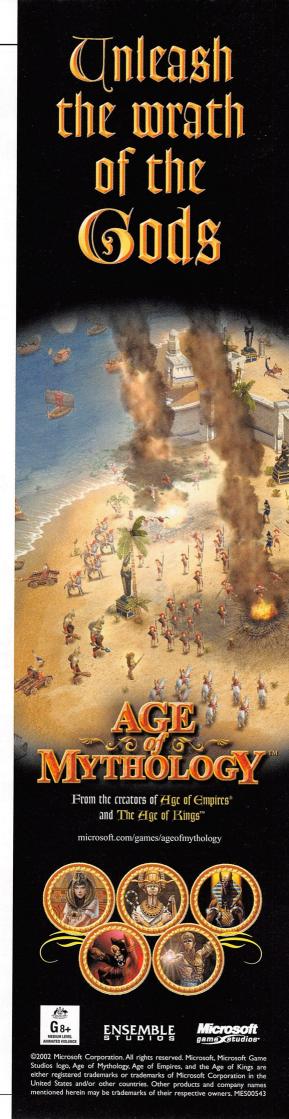
Top Gamer Offers Services for a Price



he pursuit of excellence and the pursuit of money have come together to produce this interesting E-Bay auction: a games whiz has offered to spend a day bestowing wisdom on the highest bidder.

Jonathan "Fatality" Wendell is apparently rated the world's number one player (being the first person to win over a \$100,000 in a year on the tournament circuits). For their money, the winning bidder will receive videogame training, general tips, advice and signed memorabilia.

The fact that this was up for sale is odd enough, that the package went for more than \$1000 (\$US760) is odder still.



EULA'S DODGINESS RECOGNISED

Copyright Law Committee Investigates

n Australian study has shown that online contracts and end user agreements could strip users of their rights. The Copyright Law Committee has released its report, Copyright and Contract, which was commissioned by federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams last year.

It found that many contracts signed by software users were in excess of the law. In fact, under Australian law you can't have agreements which overwrite copyright laws. Furthermore, the

BYTE SIZE

TINY DIGNITY THROWN

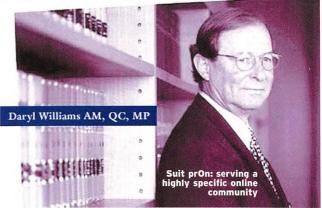
A 1.14m stunt man has gone to the UN **Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination** Committee for the noble goal of getting Dwarf throwing back into places of entertainment throughout France. He had been out of work since the highest Administrative Court in ruled that Dwarf Throwing was contrary to human dignity in the mid 90s. He argued to the UN that he was being discriminated against because he wasn't allowed to work. Strangely, UN upheld the ban. Our solution for the poor quy? Get on the Doesn't obey development bandwagon and bring out Dwarf

Throwing Arena 2003.

Computer Programs Amendment Act allows users to make back-up copies of programs, security test them, run error correction and even reverse engineer code for the development of new technology to work with the original.

The report recommends introducing legislation which will ensure that EULA elements which contravene the Copyright Act have

As it stands at the moment, to break these contracts would take expensive test cases which is a good deterrent for people trying to protect their rights.



VIETNAM MED EVAC

Lots of Virtual Guys Screaming "Medic!"



nterActive Vision are working on a chopper sim that puts players into the steamy jungles of the Vietnamese war not as lone wolf soldiers going after POW.s or as platoon sergeants, but in the role of medical personnel.

The gameplay centres on flying rescue choppers into various hot zones and getting as many young Americans to safety as possible. The action doesn't focus on being a combat sim as much as a being a Medical Evac sim. That's a new category, right?

That's not to say there isn't any fighting - you still have big arse big machineguns on the side of your chopper, but surely they are for "purely defensive" purposes.

NO GAMES FOR YOU 2

Greece Still Maintains Kookiness

ast month we reported that the Greek government had outlawed computer gaming and had taken two Internet café owners to court. Both cases were thrown out of court. We though it was the end of the story.

An appeals court has overthrown the decision and the cases are to be retried. The dismissed cases and international scorn have not been totally in vain, however.

After the decision to re-try the cases the government has amended the law allowing people to play games "with no connection to paid services". That allows people to play their Gameboys and Xboxes but what about playing any game online?

A law professor in Greece has said that it will take a decision in the Greek Supreme Court or by the European Union to overturn the law which was passed unanimously by both the government and

opposition. He said the law was unconstitutional as well as breeching EU law, not to mention being absurd.





strainer

BYTE SIZE

BLONDE EXTINCTION

A German scientist says that within 200 years blondes will be an endangered species. The blonde hair gene is recessive - it has to be in both grandparents to come through. His research also found that many men found bottle blondes more attractive than real blondes - cutting down on their reproductive edge. (And the link to gaming is? Ed) Institute sadly produced only terrible failures





SURVEYOR: Addictive Landscape Editor

Gives you the power to design, build and populate a complete 3D environment with 1000's of objects, to make the ultimate layout.

DRIVER: A Full Driving Simulation

Climb into the cab, and take control. Drive from different perspectives, switch between trains to perform railroad operations from your favourite vantage points.



SCENARIOS: Immersive Gameplay

Compelling and immersive gameplay where you become the train driver in a variety of passenger runs, shunting yard exercises and heavy freight operations.

MY COLLECTION: Engine Shed Viewing

Scroll through your complete 3D inventory of over 130 different locos, passenger cars, freight wagons, tank cars and cabooses from around the world.



TRAINZ PAINTSHED

Repaint your favorite locos and rolling stock. Create your own paint schemes, or replicate an existing rail company livery.

TRAINZ exchange

The place to download new maps, new content, locomotives and rollingstock for free! Quick and easy in-game access to dynamically loaded internet news, reviews, and much more.











HIGH FLYING FRAGS

Planes prep for Broadband



erman national airliner Lufthansa is preparing to give passengers broadband Internet access during flights. The plan uses a system called Connexion, which has been developed by Boeing, and uses special antennas and a hook-up making use of existing satellites.

Lufthansa is being used as a test case to help fine tune the technology and it hopes to have a test plane fully outfitted by April 2003. The service will be available for people in all classes with in-seat screens built into business class. For those in economy you'll have a port to plug your mobile device into. The service is likely to be a paid one, tearing raw bloody chunks off your credit card. The service is expected to be in all Lufthansa flights by mid 2004, with other airlines to follow. This is good news for gamers - anything that helps time fly on a long trip must be a good thing.

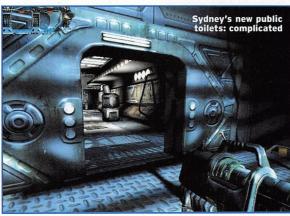
PUBLICITY STUNT DRIVING Or natural selection at work?

cclaim has pulled out all the stops to market its Burnout 2 game - as long as you consider speeding fines a stop. As a promotion it offered to pay UK driver's speeding fines for the UK release date of Burnout 2. Acclaim said it just wanted to ease the pain of drivers who were speeding to buy its game. All the poor drivers were doing was looking for a world where they can drive as fast as they like.

Strangely enough, this move didn't make the UK government too happy. It said that this promotion gave a clear message that it was okay to speed on October 11. No Burnout 2-related deaths have been reported thus far so it looks like Acclaim won't be sued out of business



KREED **Sci-fi, Fanaticism and Guns**



reed is not your average sci-fi shooter. Sure, it's set in space, sure, you have sci-fi guns and fight aliens but it's more than just that. Kreed takes a humanity that has gone into the stars and had its butt kicked, only to band together in religious fanaticism to throw off the alien oppressors.

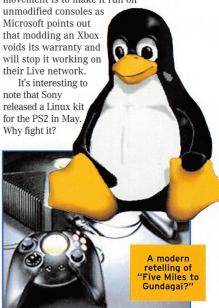
The game looks at the harsh and zealous society that produces and then introduces the Kreed, a strange black hole that is not just a dangerous chuck of space but also a test of faith. In the Kreed our main character, an ex-soldier for the cause, will come across alien mother ships, ship graveyards, fragments of planets and even pass between dimensions.

He'll come across human fanatics waiting for the "Absolute Enemy" and there might even be some alien butt kicking. The Kreed is the first title from Russian developer Burut, but they don't seem shy and Kreed is looking very interesting indeed.

CONSOLE LINUX Geeks Bring on Alternative OS

roject Linux have declared victory in bringing Linux to the Xbox with its latest attempt being fully compatible with Mandrake Linux 9. Now people will be able to use a USB mouse and keyboard through a standard Xbox USB adaptor to turn their console into a cheap PC. The project got a big boost when an anonymous donor offered \$US200,000 to the team who pulled it off first.

The next big goal for the Linux to Xbox movement is to make it run on

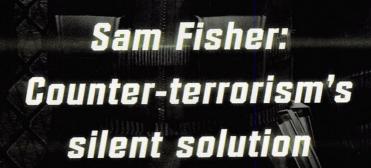


BYTE SIZE

BMW CHEATMODE

The European version of the new BMW M3's software apparently is going to have a sequence of commands that allows the clutch to be dropped at 4000RPM - or, in other words, it unlocks a "burnout mode" Normally the electronically controlled manual transmission wouldn't allow such abuse but the sequence of commands is seen as the world's first automotive Easter Egg. Use of the feature more than 15 times voids the warranty.



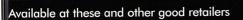


Tom Clancy's SPLINTER

To know more, connect to: www.splintercell.com



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BYTE SIZE

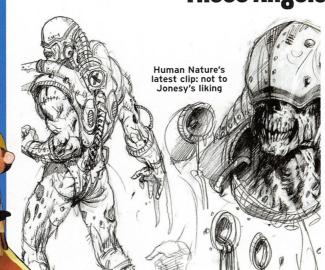
BOB THE BASHER

SHADE: WRATH OF ANGELS These Angels are Shady Indeed

A game was pulled from the official Bob the Builder site for being too violent. An Adelaide father complained after visiting the site (with his 15 month old daughter) and taking part in "Whack Spud". Spud is a character of the show and players would bash him with a mallet as he emerged from a garbage can to win. The father wrote to the site saying that the only thing the game taught was "wanton violence" against another living being. The Bob the Builder people pulled the game. No longer can you whack your spud.

Square

tomatoes, GM's latest crime?



lack Element Software is another newcomer to the development game and another European studio. They hail from Prague so they should have a handle on creepy and gothic. In fact, the head of Bohemia Software (Operation Flashpoint developers) was so impressed with Black Element that he bought the company.

Shade is the tale of a man with inner demons. Not like drink or an abused childhood, no, he has demons that he can unleash on his enemies and which give him supernatural powers - but at the price of his humanity (well, duh). You'll be able to use the demonic forces freely but if you do, don't try to pick up a hot date on a Saturday night unless she'll literally into horny devils.

Shade is still in early development so you'll just have to keep your eye out for more of that European gloom.



ou'll never guess what the premise of this game is, especially if I mention it's sci-fi. No clue? Well, strangely enough you wake up on board an alien spacecraft

You have to wander around what looks like a deserted spaceship, gathering clues and solving puzzles - well, that's until you find the spaceship isn't quite as deserted as you thought and then there's more action, running and sneaking involved.

Can you find out who you are and what you're doing there? Can you do it without losing any essential limbs? Abducted is being developed by Contraband Entertainment and is written up as a cinematic horror, combat, mystery game.

BYTE SIZE

MCSIMS

Intel and MacDonalds have signed a deal with EA for product placement in the Sims Online. Players will now be able to buy upgradeable Intel-brand computers with higher processors meaning higher fun and logic ratings. You'll also be able to run Internet cafes and McDonald's kiosks. Now, in Sims Online, when vou're out and about and need a snack you can pick up your favourite virtual burgers. It

BYTE SIZE

TOO HARDCORE

In October, a 24-year-old South Korean man took his hobby way too far. He was found dead in an Internet CafeÇ after playing for approximately 86 hours straight - that's three and a half days. Witnesses say that the man didn't sleep or eat during the time. He collapsed once, got up and went to the toilet where he was later found dead. Further investigation has shown the man wasn't even playing - he was farming online Big Brother 3 worlds for highvalue items to sell on E-Bay.

Yeah, back off foo

The new opera

house: controversial seems that Sims

are low-fat no more.

oo is a cartoon game with an interesting concept: your character is an animal who robs temples in the dead of night, while laying traps to slow any pursuers, all with an ancient Chinese backdrop. You can choose a dragon, tiger, panda, rat or ape and you'll have special skills depending on which way you go.

You'll also have a choice of traps to carry, with the limitations being that the more trappage you carry the less quickly you'll move and the less free space you'll have for loot. Finally, the temples and palaces will be created with a random map generator so you'll never have to loot the same place twice. Foo is being developed by Singularity Software and while no official Oz date has been set it should arrive early-ish next year.



what have we got online? well we've got free newsletters, latest headlines, previews, reviews, news features, tech news, hardware, retro, downloads, hints, cheats, demos, patches, mods, movies, utilities, screenshots, subscriptions, MP3 players, peripherals, monitors, graphics cards, sound cards, consoles, motherboards, chip sets, digital cameras, CPUs, applications, forums, games feedback, content discussions, poor attempts at humour, far too passionate arguments about the song Stairway to Heaven, an excess of staff-sledging, old games, new games, people in games, people outside games, people who want to be in games, career opportunites! idiots! geniuses! people of average mental aptitude! the best of! the worst of! drama! comedy! questions about the universe asked and answered! OH MY GOD! AND ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS GO TO: www.pcpowerplay.com.au

AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED

The games you want to play now, but still have to wait for

1 Unreal 2

2 C&C Generals

3 Age of Mythology

4 Doom 3

5 Dues Ex 2

6 Ironstorm

7 Combat Flight Sim 3

8 Impossible Creatures

9 Lock On

Haegemonia

Australia's Most Wanted is collated monthly from votes sent to:

amw@pcpowerplay.com.au. Be a part of it, send your 10 most wanted games today!

t's good to see that at least some of you react to the things we print in this mag thing we do. Last month saw Unreal 2 hovering uncertainly around the middle of the chart, but following our massive preview in PCPP#80, it's since shot to #1. In the case of Age of Mythology, it's rather surprisingly slipped two slots to #3, but never fear. We have a beta in our hot little hands now, so look out for our review very very soon now.

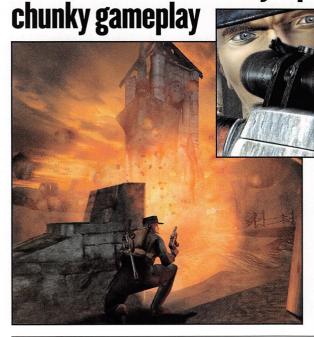
A couple of unexpected titles made it into the chart this month too, most notably Ironstorm. Our review on page 52 likes it, and the folks out there in FilePlanet land obviously reacted favourably to the demo - it's on this month's coverdisc if you missed out or had already exceeded your 'generous' download limit on your ADSL connection (Ha! - Ed). And making a return to the AMW list from a long absence, a couple of flight sims. We can only presume CFS3 for the pedigree and the attention to detail, and Lock On for the pretty, pretty graphics. Want more Lock On goodness? Examine the preview on page 48.

And so another AMW winds up, finishing with Haegemonia slipping in to #10 on a wing and a prayer and a huge chunk of sweet, sweet gameplay. We're looking forward to each and every one of these games, you should too.



IRONSTORM - 5 TO BE WON!

Where alternate history equals



It's the latest and greatest thing. Ironstorm, the game that came from nowhere and rocked our singleplayer FPS world. It starts off kind of like Medal of Honor, and six or seven hours in it turns into a dogface version of Half-Life. It really is that good. And to prove it, we've wrestled 5 copies from the desperate embrace of the good folks at Take2, just for you. But you won't be getting them easily.

Deciding what hoops to make you all jump through to get your free games is one of the real pleasures in this job - apart from Send entries to: There Is No PCPP C/- PC PowerPlay 78 Renwick St Redfern NSW 2016

the getting paid to play games all day and filling our machines with free cutting-edge technology that is. But imagine, if you can, a world without PCPP. An alternate history that began in March 1996 when Next Media decided, what with one thing being another and the state of gaming at the time, not to launch Australia's oldest and most respected PC-dedicated gaming mag. Imagine, simply, a world without PCPP.

We want your alternate history timeline, covering the years 1996 to 2002. Let your imagination soar. What far reaching social effects here and abroad were caused by the absence of PCPP? What kind of life would Deputy Editor Jere Lawrence have been forced to pursue? Would there have been fighting in the streets? The collapse of the Australian PC gaming industry? Famine? Or would it be a world of peace and harmony?

The most detailed and imaginative Alternate Histories will each receive a copy of Ironstorm, and believe me, this is one game you definitely want. It's all thanks to Take2 and the team at 4X Studios.

STARFLEET COMMAND 3 2 TO BEWON!

It's a sad and slightly scary fact that even after all these years, even after Captain Janeway, there are still Trekkies. Out there, in the dark, bathed in cathode rays, getting all excited about Seven of Nine's latest operation.

Nevertheless, we feel your pain. And to ease it in some small way we've appealed to the kind sensibilities of the fine folks at Activision and secured two copies of Starfleet Command 3, which Jere liked quite a lot, liked so much in fact that he nearly fell off the Trekkiewagon and had to call his TA sponsor. 'The Doctor' told him to take it one day at a time, and to always thank a higher power so long as that higher power wasn't O. Anyway, for you to get your sweaty, pasty

Trekkie hands on a copy of SFC3, all you need to do is supply us with a Star Trek flavoured retelling of your favourite fairy-tale. Keep it short, sweet, and full of obscure Deep Space Nine references.

Send entries to:
Goldilocks and the Borg
Collective
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UT 2003 5 TO BE WON It's the latest deathmatch 'thing'. It requires

a ridiculously overpowered computer to run, it has stunning graphics, and it makes Jere covet the new 3GHz Pentium 4 with all the bells and whistles that will allow him to run the game at its maximum settings. So naturally, you want a copy. Which is lucky because thanks to GameNation, we have five to give away, though, we require a little something from you: it's kodak time, folks. We want to see (publishable) photographs of your good self in a 'tournament' context. Either going one-on-one with the family dog or with a perfect stranger down the street. We want to see aggression, accuracy and all the other things you get ranked on in UT2003. Be warned - any cruelty to animals/kids/the elderly or anything illegal then we will set the dogs on you. And by dogs we mean the law. Not that they're dogs or anything .. I'll shut up now.

Send entries to: Fight of the Millennium C/- PC PowerPlay 78 Renwick St Redfern NSW 2016

COMING SOON

DECEMBER

2002

Asheron's Call 2 (Microsoft)	04/12/02
Catz 5 (Ubi Soft)	05/12/02
Championship Manager 4 (Infogrames)	06/12/02
Dogz 5 (Ubi Soft)	05/12/02
Dragon's Lair 3D (Infogrames)	19/12/02
Master Of Orion 3 (Infogrames)	05/12/02
Splinter Cell (Ubi Soft)	10/12/02
Jedi Outcast Expansion Pack (Activision)	Mid Dec
Tribes 2 Expansion (Vivendi)	Late Dec
Vietnam: POW Rescue (TBA)	12/12/02
Warlords IV (Infogrames)	01/12/02

JANUARY

2003

1503 AD New World (EA)	20/01/03
Airport Tycoon 2 (TBA)	07/02/03
Battlefield 1942: Southern Front (EA)	14/01/03
C&C Generals (EA)	20/01/03
Freelancer (Microsoft)	22/01/03
Enclave (Vivendi)	29/01/03
Impossible Creatures (Microsoft)	15/01/03
Indian Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (EA)	15/01/03
Monster Jam: Max Destruction (Infogrames)	20/01/03
Operation Steel Tide (Infogrames)	15/01/03
Rise of Nations (Microsoft)	22/01/03
Sim City 4000 (EA)	14/01/03
Vietcong (THQ)	15/01/03

FEBRUARY

2003

Counter Strike: Condition Zero (Vivendi)	01/02/03
IGI 2: Covert Strike (Infogrames)	01/02/03
Imperium Galactica 3 (TBA)	08/02/03
Planetside (Ubi Soft)	14/02/03
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield (Infogrames)	01/02/03
Star Wars Galaxies (Activision)	Late Feb
Ultima Online: Age of Shadows (EA)	15/02/03

WELCOME TO THE FACTORY FLOOR

Timothy C Best



s it just me, or are things starting to look the same? Multitudes of cars with their aerodynamic curves; a host of cloned TV starlets with their silicon-enhanced curves and myriad action movies with their explosions, slo-mo, CG effects and predictable plot curves. And for a couple of years now, games have tended to look the same with their poly-slickness. Damn you, convergent technology.

I don't know if I've been around the block too many times and I'm jaded or whether I haven't been out of my playpen and still have stars blocking my eyes.

I was leaning towards the jaded side until I watched Waking Life. I stared at it in animationloving wonder. For people who haven't seen Waking Life, painting animation over scenes shot on standard 35mm film creates this unusual indy film's unique cartoon look. What amazed me about this movie was the way in which the character perceived the world changed completely to match what the filmmakers were trying to say, by doing things as simple as varying line thickness, concentrating on making more solid shapes out of areas of shadow, bending lines or even adding paint-like brushstrokes. Throughout the film. while the palette and technology driving the animation didn't change, we were moved through totally new ways of looking at the world.

Now here's my analogy: I don't see why painting animation onto film is any different to painting textures onto polygons. How come we always seem to get the same style of animation for games?

Finding a new style

A frame from No One Lives For Ever 2 is rarely going to get mistaken for Deus Ex 2 or the Sims Online, but I'm talking about a sameness that goes further than being just skin-deep. What I'm talking about is a basic way of interpreting things into 3D games.

Modern games seem to be working off the 'blueprint of perfection'. The developers (or the money behind them) seem to have fallen in love with the idea of making games that look like movies. Polygons that report for duty should look as much like the Matrix, Saving Private Ryan or CNN coverage as possible, anything less is a waste of graphic quality. Notice that I don't use the word realistic here - I don't even consider CNN to depict the world with any particular degree of realism.

In every 3D game, human figures always keep 'normal' proportions (you could point to Lara Croft as an exception - to which I'd point to Pamela Anderson by way of a reply) hair sticks to the head or moves in some simple strings, clothes are skin-tight except trench coats which have swaying tails and so on. Guns are always more textured and detailed than faces, buildings have clean lines

except for where there's exposed metal which invariably is dirty and rusty to break things up.

Look at Max Payne, for example. All of the cutscenes were done as gritty noir graphic novels and the story followed the novel conventions, but when it came to the gameplay the graphics ditched the graphic novel feel and went back to the grail of modern action games - the movies. Sure it's dark, and sure Max uses two guns at once, but his character model would fit into any of a bunch of games. It has that Evolved-from-Quake poly-realism.

Whole New World

Without doubt, computer games share more with computer and hand-drawn animation than live movies. Even as animation technology improves you don't see animation movies converging in look or artistic style. Futurama, Reboot, Shadow Raiders, Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within, Waking Life, Monsters Inc, Lain, Graveyard of the Fireflies, South Park and the Batman animated series all have very distinctive styles and run the gamut from kids humour to deadly serious and each uses its unique style to heighten (or subvert) whatever its narrative is doing.

If you believe you have to do real to do adult, think about Dave McKean's Arkham Asylum, Alan Moore's Watchmen, Art Spiegelman's Maus or even Munch's famous painting The Scream.

If we had more people with hardcore artistic skills to match their marketing nous we might get more games like Grim Fandango. This Lucasarts classic doesn't look like a movie. It doesn't have its look stolen from a cartoon.

It looks like a Mexican Day of the Dead parade as see by Walt Disney on some hard LSD - which is perfect for a head-trip into the land of the dead.

Good as it was, and even though Grim Fandango had a feel all of its own and interpreted the world in a unique way, it

also had a lot of obvious, rounded, similarities to many of games out there and that's because we're in the age of the Poly-pusher and it dominates what we do. It's hard to imagine modern, 3D, games that are outside of that box.

Vox Pops

For a while we had voxels. Deltaforce, Tiberian Sun and Outcast all used them. Outcast was probably the best example of how voxels could look, and lo-and-behold it wasn't all-smooth.

After playing Outcast for a while you start to notice just how polysaturated we've become.

The voxel graphics just look different - a different take on the world. Instead of being shiny and clean they had more weight and texture, almost a sculptural quality. Voxels are best thought of as 3D sprites that build up objects, kind of like lego, instead of inflating a mesh balloon and painting textures onto it.

There are other visually distinct games too: Baldur's Gate, Icewind Dale and Planescape Torment all draw much of their visual punch from trying something other than polygons. All of the lavish backgrounds are carefully painted which gave them a handcrafted feel and scale all of their own. It made playing the games feel like wandering through some high fantasy novel, or in the case of Icewind Dale, an epic poem. It also meant that elevation and interacting with the environment rely heavily on a sort of graphical sleight-of-hand but it's worth it for something different to look at. They don't have the poly-feel which pervades the majority of games.

Polyunsaturated

The most interesting new direction in overall look and freeing the art designer from the yoke of conformity must be cel-shading. This way we can make poly-filled games look like cartoons, painting the animated look onto polygons, like they painted it onto film for Waking Life.

The technology was developed on the Dreamcast for the groundbreaking Jetset Radio, years ago, and since then have we got to show for it? Very little, except the upcoming shooter XIII (see First Look on

page 14), which looks impressive even if it is a fairly unimaginative take on the comic style.

To see how far behind PC games are you only have to look to the small Japanese studios loosing their minds on the PS2, producing unique worlds and whole new visual styles. Check out Jo Jo's

Bizarre Adventure, from the first frames you see there's something just fascinating about the way it moves - it's a fresh worldview like the first time you watched the Dark Crystal or the second time you watched Fight Club. There are options out there. Now it's up to developers to explore them.

And this is why Jere's in-depth feature on the possibilities offered by DirectX 9.1 (page 90) doesn't excite me all that much. So, maybe I am jaded because leaps forward that involve games doubling in poly count don't knock my socks off, but maybe my jaded socks are just waiting for something new...

Animations don't converge in look: Futurama, Waking Life and Southpark all use their own unique style to heighten or subvert the narrative





The Guerrilla Gamer



ince before the dawn of time Men who placed themselves above other men have sat and pondered the great questions of life. Indeed in those times when little was known of the world it was important to discuss the nature of things, what kind of cheese was the Moon made of? Where do Goats come from? Why do hard round things roll down hills while wet sloppy things don't?

These questions and more formed the basis of modern thought, science and philosophy but what happens when the world changes from a place empty of, and hungry for, knowledge to a place overflowing with it? When there is nothing really important left to find out that doesn't require a football field sized facility and the annual budget of a small African nation? What do these perennial students do with their otherwise pointless lives, what direction do they take their now impotent cranial capacity?

Think of the children!

What else can they do but try and make themselves relevant by inventing new and previously undreamed of plagues, disasters and curses to hang over our heads while they look on with sour faced rapprochement? You've no doubt come across these bleating nay-sayers in many areas of your life; you've probably heard the mantras many times over: don't give kids fireworks, they might get hurt! Don't let your kids play football, they might get hurt! Don't mix meat and starch in your diet, you might get hurt!

Well these cranks must have thought all their Christmases had come at once when the games industry started hitting its stride. Mums and Dads desperately trying to find a subject for their Psychology Doctorate found ready and willing fodder in their own children while watching them enjoy their favourite hobby. Now we are awash with data from so called 'studies' done on gaming and gamers. Some University in Pig Swill Alabama can tell you exactly how many times the average American teenager passes wind while waiting for Counter-Strike maps to load. In fact there is a website that monitors that information 24 hours a day for the benefit of parents and law enforcement agencies.

In fact there are literally thousands of these emasculated nitwits desperately picking their meagre brains for yet another angle on how games are the modern equivalent of Bubonic Plague. Kind of makes you feel like wheeling a cart down to your local LAN cafe and shouting "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead!"

Bring out your babes

One of the smorgasbord of flavours of the month that seems to be a perennial favourite with the dogooders is the portrayal of women in games. Lois Salisbury, president of Children Now and general

games industry big nose, was responsible for a study which came up with the following findings. "Fifty-four

percent of the games surveyed contained female lead characters while 92 percent had male lead characters. Those games which feature female characters tend to display women in an

exaggerated and stereotypical manner, with 38 percent displaying significant body exposure, including cleavage, thighs and midriffs' Heavens. Ms Salisbury doesn't go into detail

about what actually constitutes a cleavage or a midriff, whether or not it has to be pixel shaded or anisotropically filtered, but it's nice to know that there's someone out there who isn't letting a single thigh get past them.

"In addition, 38 percent of female game characters had large breasts and 46 percent had unusually small waists. Altogether, 54 percent of the female characters were depicted as fighting or being violent, while many also exhibited stereotypical female behaviour and characteristics.

"The unhealthy messages that both girls and boys absorb from this new media impacts the way they think girls are supposed to look and act. For example, in certain games the females emitted a high-pitched giggle or sigh in reaction to different actions by the player," the study said. "Their male counterparts, in contrast, had no such response."

Hmm, I think that the concept of marketing must have slipped by Ms. Salisbury while she was measuring her breasts. Hands up everyone who would have played Counter-Strike if all the player characters sounded like Big Gay Al from South Park? Exactly.

So Ms. Lois Salisbury got paid some kind of grant to sit down and work out what percentage of computer game females have large breasts and exposed midriffs, and she thinks we're the ones in need of guidance? Let's not just take her opinion, what does the military think?

Men with guns

The most seemingly convincing argument for the hypothesis that violent video games alter their user's behaviour comes from Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, a psychologist and adjunct professor at Arkansas State University, who specialised as a "killologist" for the United States military.

That's right, a "killologist" Ask your careers advisor about that one!

After more than 25 years researching the psychology of killing for the Army, Grossman is convinced that the willingness to kill another person does not come naturally but is a learned behaviour. It requires desensitization by repeated exposure to violence and classical conditioning by associating aggressive acts with a pleasant experience.

According to Grossman computer games do this all too well, but then again so does going to the supermarket, apparently. And while we're at it, so does playing Rugby League for that matter, and well, Red Rover, Surfing Bondi on the weekend, driving

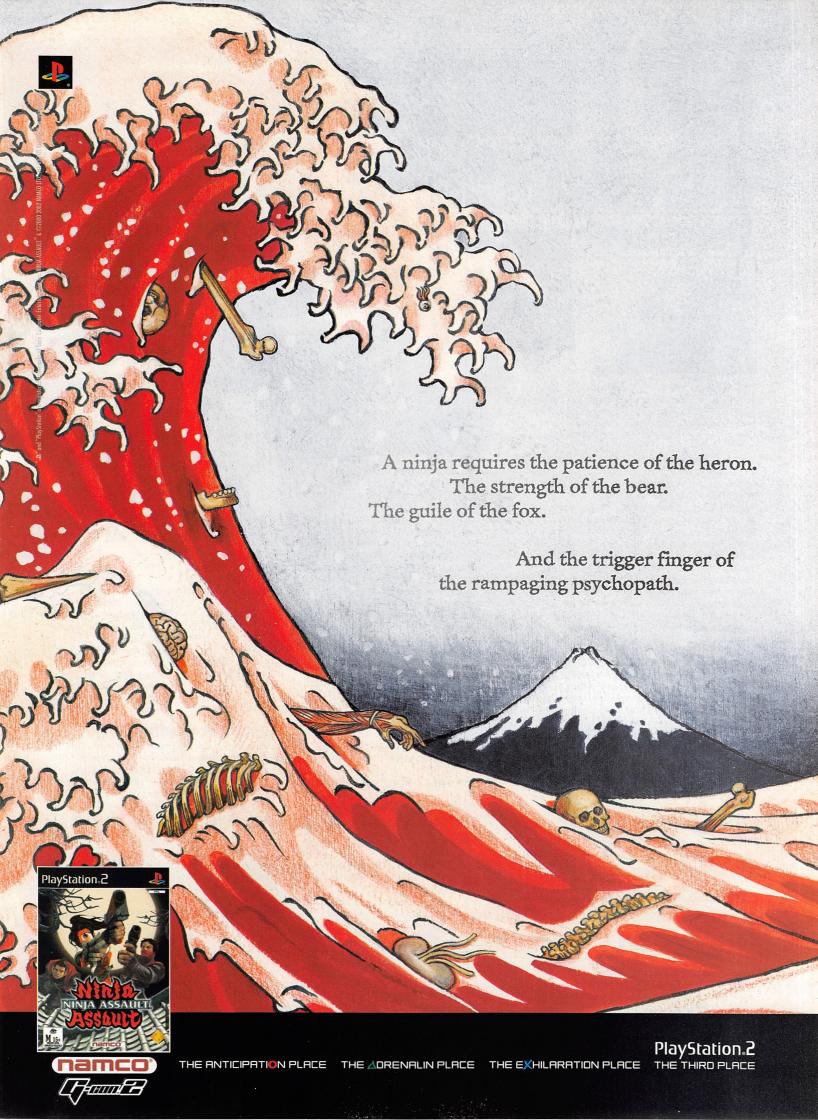
anywhere in Sydney, nightclubbing, going to the Motor Registry Office, and any number of other things we accept as part of modern living.

Of course the most recent scapegoat for game hating puritans is the Washington Sniper. I mean the guy must be a Counter-Strike player right? He's finally snapped and lost the ability to tell the difference between real people and polygons. Sure. When his landlord asks for the rent he just says "no way man, you're just a pile of polygons, my money is incompatible with your desktop resolution." When he's in his car on the way to a stake-out he quite often swerves to the wrong side of the road while looking for the Turbo Boost button on his dashboard.

Maybe someone should tell these people that the Taliban banned all kinds of games while they were in power in Afghanistan, and gee what a wonderfully peaceful, sexually liberated bunch of guys they all turned out to be.

The Guerrilla Gamer is a an old, old game journalist who has spent an inordinate amount of time hanging around in seedy internet cafes to the extent that he now thinks what goes on in there constitutes normal, healthy human behaviour. The staff of PCPP hopes against hope that one day he will learn the difference between fantasy and reality.

What else can they do but try and make themselves relevant by inventing previously unheard of disasters?



NOT PIRATING JUST BACKING UP

Stuart Calvin



Software backup - ever had any problems doing this? Join one of the largest clubs on the planet because it's 'hit or miss' without a little knowledge. There are three major software copy protection schemes. SafeDisc and SecuROM are used extensively in Australia while LaserLock is found only on a few game titles, Desperados being one such animal. There have been a slew of game titles released since June 2002 boasting a new and improved SecuROM copy protection. Backing up your precious game CDs may be legal in specific cases but the law doesn't explicitly state that it has to be easy and it's become just about impossible yet again. In summary, you can backup protected game titles up to and including The Thing (SecuROM v4.77.00.0029). Game titles from Emperor: Rise Of The Middle Kingdom (v4.77.00.0050) and onwards are thwarting all consumer attempts to defeat the copy protection employing a 1:1 backup method. All you UT2K3 gurus out there had better look after that original disc because a working 1:1 backup is not falling your way. There are reports of successful backups of the UK release of Unreal Tournament 2003, however, if you do manage to make a working backup of UT2K3, my sources tell me that it will only be due to a known bug in the SecuROM version. And remember, using no-CD executables is cheating, no fun and most uncool for its illegal overtones.

Non standard CD masters

By the time you read this, the current crop of backup problems may well be tweaked out in either the optical unit firmware or in the replication software such as Blindwrite or Alcohol 100% to name a few. Then again, the

The chances of CDs being damaged has increased. I, for one, know what a rabid bunch of 14 year olds can do to a CD storage unit after an evening of deathmatching

closer I get to my deadline, my research shows the further away a popular solution seems. So what's the issue? It appears that SecuROM copy protected game titles are being stamped onto special, custom-made CD media. That is, media you and I cannot purchase for the purpose of effecting a 1:1 backup. We're talking noncompliant Coloured Book standard CDs in terms of physical structure. The glass master used to

produce original SecuROM protected The SecuROM loader verifies these parameters and checks that they are indeed changing along the track which is not the case on our 1:1 copies. You cannot copy it on consumer media because normal CD-R/RWs have consistent characteristics all over the disc (track pitch, etc) and the parameters are different than the parameters of the master. It is the same as trying to duplicate a \$100 note on normal paper, it looks OK but it won't pass muster - you must have special paper.

Toothpicks under the fingernails

Until the release of WarCraft 3, SecuROM copy protection problems were limited to burners/readers that could not read or write subchannel data. Of course most burners can read and write this special data; similarly, many CD/DVD-ROMs can read the P to W subchannels correctly. But if you own something like a Hewlett Packard HP6020I then anything in the subchannels like SecuROM, and things such as CD-Text, the ISRC, Catalogue Numbers, CD+G, CD+MIDI, Gaps, and Indices are out of the question. Now you need a reliable subchannel reader and that's emphasis on reliable dear readers.

If you regularly backup your game titles onto CD-R/W then you'd probably know about the

NWN fiasco. Bioware eventually, and not too soon, 'patched out' the SecuROM copy protection for a very good reason:

'We are fully aware of this issue (not being able to play original CDs) and customers not being able to play our games pains us like toothpicks under the fingernails. We are working

towards a solution." - Derek French, Producer, Live Team Neverwinter Nights. On the 27th of August 2002 Bioware released a patch, v1.23 for NWN, wherein they claimed to have dropped SecuROM completely. It took a while because problems started back in late June/early July 2002... and that's just one little gem!

An added woe is that the SafeDisc version found on The Sims Unleashed has knocked

CloneCD off it's perch. A 1:1 Unleashed backup is possible with the right combination of hardware and software (ASUS burner as reader/writer and DiscJuggler as one example). You can at least get an Unleashed backup that'll work in CD/DVD-ROM units but not a burner, despite using something like CloneCD's "Hide CD-R Media" feature. Mafia is the last SafeDisc protected game title that anyone with a Lite-On and half a brain can backup properly. From the Sims Unleashed, which is a bit of a shocker unless you're an eleven year old girl, and onwards we're in a bit of trouble.

A grim and cheerless future

The backup problem will get worse for us because the software publishers are determined to destroy the pirate industry. The publishers have money to burn because every Euro spent on protecting just one CD means more of their investment is returned as profit. As the older games go back to the shelf and newer games litter the table, chances of damaging a CD increase because it's not safely stored away. I, for one, know what a rabid bunch of 14 year olds can do to a CD storage unit after an evening of death-matching.

Are our rights being infringed? A big 'perhaps' is the best answer at the moment. I'm happy to use an original CD if there's no kids, cats, dogs or budgies loose in the house but I do insist on a legal backup for LAN Parties - for many obvious reasons. I'm sorry to say it, but as copy protection strengthens, I hope that more and more gamers can't run copy protected original discs and more hopefully, that's across a wide range of PC brands and models rather than a limited range of units. This means that the publishers will have to wind back the noncompliance being built into the CD. I definitely don't want to have to disconnect a burner everytime I want to play a game which is what Derek French told thousands of NWN players to do when they patched to v1.21. Alan Fels, where are you?

SecuROM



Release: November 2002

roject Nomads is an interesting mix of RTS and 3D action gaming and is a breath of fresh air in these stagnant-times of endless clones and sequels"

GAME S

Story

The catastrophe: The planet of the Nomads bursts! - A fascinating world with drifting islands was created. - The game character you choose has survived.

DESTROY THE PERPETRATORS OF THE CATASTROPHE. WITH MAGIC ITEMS, YOU CAN TRANSFORM YOUR ISLAND INTO A BATTLE GIANT. USE HEAVILY ARMED FLIGHT DEVICES TO SEARCH for further artifacts and in order to gain raw materials for your energy supply. The showdown is imminent.

There's heaps to do in this unique action strategy RPG. Snap to it!

Breathtaking 3D worlds with spectacular graphics

FEATURES

- 3 different heroes to choose from: smart John, strong Goliath and beautiful Susie
- Individual tactics depending on the choice of character
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- 8 main quests with numerous sub QUESTS
- More than 40 different opponents
- Special effects, buildings, vehicles, etc. for each CHARACTER
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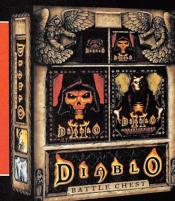
Because we love games, and we love Vivendi, and because Vivendi publishes and distributes games, we've put all these things together to give two lucky subscribers the chance to win one of the fattest game packs ever seen in the pages of PCPP. And because of the Diablo Battle Chest, which contains Diablo II, the expansion Lord of Darkness and the original Diablo, this pack is actually 12 games in total! Someone will certainly have a merry Christmas. Whether you want the slightly kitsch

Archer in No One Lives Forever 2 or the amusing hairy-footed adventures of Frodo Baggins in Lord of the Rings, this massive games pack has something for every serious gamer. In fact it has 12 somethings. Did we not mention there are 12 games in this pack? You know you want it. And you also know you want Australia's best PC gaming mag delivered direct to your door every month. So subscribe today! It's good for the liver.

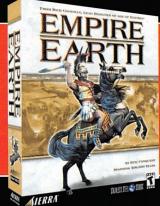
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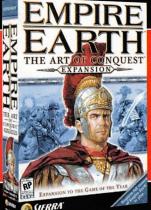
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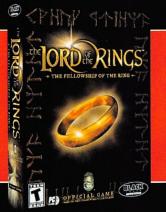
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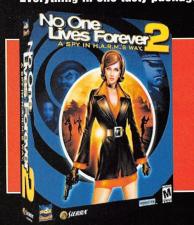
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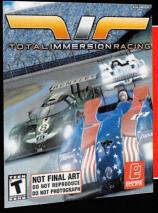
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PCPP #78

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"Evangelion is the best animated television series I have ever seen."

"There has never been a better anime series than Evangelion.

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A secret war is brewing in the night - a war in which humanity is only a pawn. The mysterious Hellsing Organization deploys within the shadows to protect ordinary mortals from the undead legions that would prey upon us.

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here are few games on console that we as hardcore PC gamers truly covet. Sure, there are plenty that look kind of interesting, like Mario Sunshine on GameCube, but I couldn't imagine actually sitting down and playing the thing. However, there has been one exception to the rule of only mild interest, because until now the PC has lacked a cinematic, atmospheric, realistic, stealth-heavy military shooter like Metal Gear Solid.

You will recall, when the PS2 was launched, how everyone went on and on about MGS2 and how they would spend \$80 on crappy third party titles just to get their hands on a copy of the MGS2 demo, and every PS2 mag in the known universe splashed that weird grainy watercolour image of Solid Snake all over their covers.

Well the point is, at last the PC is getting a decent military sneakem-up. It's called Splinter Cell and it's the first Tom Clancy branded game to be based on a new idea he's had, rather than on a book he wrote three years ago. And it's not squad-based. And it looks amazing. Our excruciatingly detailed preview begins overleaf, on page 36.

Also this month we picked up a beta of Impossible Creatures, the latest from Homeworld developers Relic. The game has matured very nicely since we saw it at Microsoft's 'International' Gaming Festival in Vegas earlier in the year, and we hope as an RTS-with-a-twist it will find a special place in your heart and not get swept away by our massive C&C Generals beta report next issue.

Also of interest is RalliSport Challenge. We reviewed this arcade rally game on Xbox during the Great Experiment, and we liked it a lot. Victor Webster opens up a can of careful consideration on the PC version, and is only momentarily dismayed by the lack of the vertexand pixel-shader effects that helped make the console version so pretty.

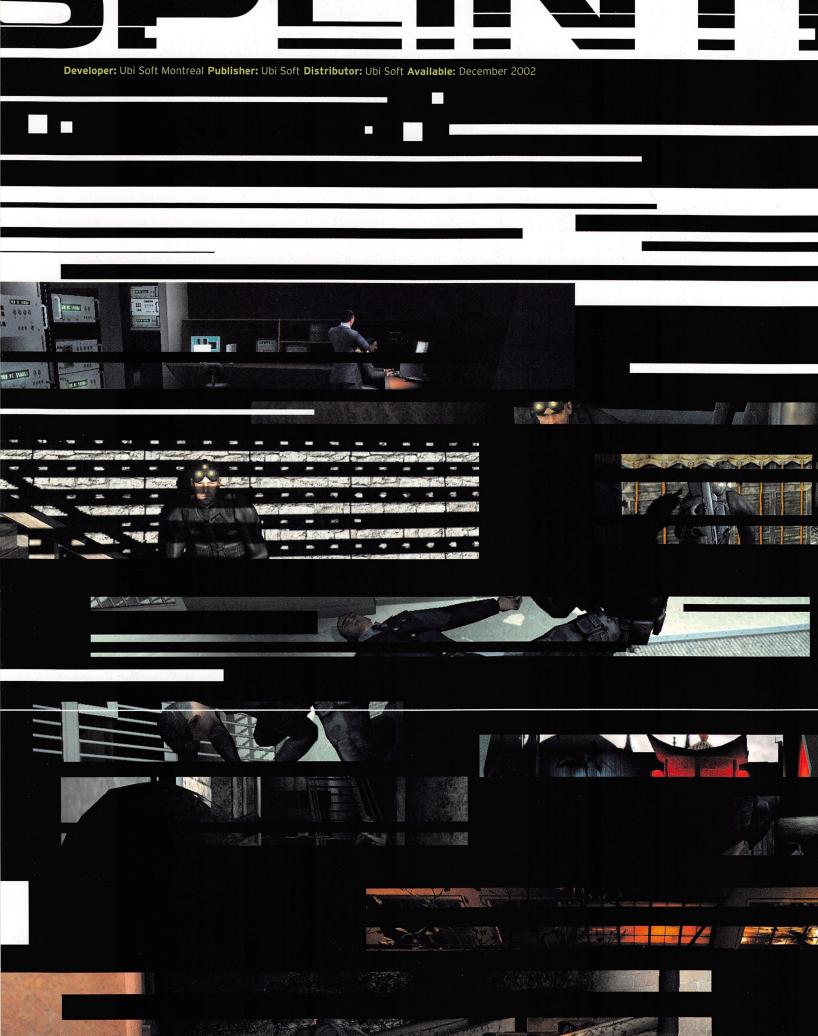
Finally check out Haegemonia. Think Homeworld meets Imperium Galactica with a healthy dose of MOO2 thrown in for good measure. You think you're playing a 3D space-based RTS, and then suddenly you click on a planet and it's a fully-featured strategy game... awesome stuff.

I know I already said finally, but REALLY finally, check out Lock On. It's a flight sim. And it's pretty, oh so pretty. We like pretty.

Justin Hoffman letters@pcpowerplay.com.au













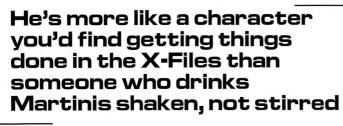
future for theoretical gadgets to have materialised and political situations to go haywire (without scaring the pants off people that it might actually be happening right now).

This time, the situation is an extension of the current War on Terror. This hidden opponent knows that information and propaganda are the battlegrounds of the future. He's using America's open lines of communication and information-rich society against itself. Conventional troops are useless in this war, so it all comes down the National

than someone
who wanders
around
introducing
himself and drinking Martinis,
shaken, not stirred.

One of the most impressive aspects of Splinter Cell is the way the gadgets, gameplay and storyline all gel together and cover each other like a well-trained sweeper squad. Things just seem to fit. You can see it in the demo games, movies and even the graphic design of the adverts.

This is a shadow war. Sam Fisher



Security Authority and its secret black ops group to make the problem disappear. That's where Sam Fisher comes in. He's dependable, discrete and operates outside all official channels.

New Approach

Since Sam is the blackest of black Ops, this is the most secret of wars. He's much more like a character you'd find getting things done in the X-Files

SEASONED VETERAN

The team decided that to have Clancy-esque believability they couldn't have your usual young buck of a hero. They needed someone with a little more seasoning, someone who was alive for some of the more interesting wars. That's why they decided to buck the idolatry of youth and make their hero, Sam Fisher, 38 years-old with hair shot with grey. They wanted someone who uses brains, nerve and experience over youthful abandon. They wanted someone who had seen everything twice and someone Michael Ironside (Star Ship Troopers, Top Gun) would be able to voice in a gunmetal chill and gravely way.

is precise, self-reliant, silent and efficient. When he's in the field he's totally on his own. Instead of back-up or street-sweeping drums of ammo he has ice water in his veins and hi-tech items which cover his arse - reducing the wild chances he has to take to a minimum.

This is how a section of gameplay works. Let's say Sam has to penetrate a warehouse and grab some files. He is dropped into a zone with his mission objectives and that's the last he'll hear from base. In the distance he hears a guard so Sam disappears back into the shadows. Once he's gone Sam shoots the outside light, plunging the area

"Dear Crazyminx, I am 15/F/Thailand and I am curious about other girls..."



SPLINTER CELL

CLANCY TECH

Special Goggles:

Thermographic and light intensifier sight modes built into one attractive three-eyed package. Thermo sight can see through walls but has tragically short range.

Optic Fibre:

Can be slid under doors to scope what's on the other side.

F2000 Modular Assault

Semi and fully automatic assault rifle. Can fire grenades, Sticky Shockers (think tasers), Ring Airfoils, flares and Sticky Cameras as well as having an advanced Fire Control System for long-range work.

Sticky Cameras:

Can fire a camera onto a wall so you can see from a different vantage point with zoom and panning functions.

Ring Airfoils:

Small, sturdy, rubber rings that fly like Areobies and can deliver a non-lethal chemical at range.

Camera Jammers:

An electric counter measure device for sneaking past electronic eyes.



he'd just charged around that corner.

He decides to look upstairs; there could be another way in. He creeps up the stairs and stops, switching to thermal vision again. Nothing - but the thermal vision is



game the player really has all the tools to control his environment and missions. If a player gets nailed it's not because of some guard that you have to know is there to beat, it's because you got careless.

Working on the Night Moves

Sam may be a low-key spook but that doesn't mean he's without moves. Sure, he'll use an elbow or the butt of his gun over a spinning roundhouse kick but that doesn't mean he's not athletic. It just means he's not showy.

Sam can hug the wall to stick to

the shadows; he can jump, crouch, walk and run. He can also

pull himself up onto objects as well as hang on ledges. He can pick up his enemy's weapons and, even better, he can

pick up his enemy's body to stash it somewhere out of sight.

That's all the standard stuff. Sam can also do commando rolls to evade fire, grab a guy and stick a gun to his head as a hostage or for information, he can rappel down surfaces and he can even do a Van Damme-style Split-jump. This involves leaping up, doing the splits and putting a foot on either side of a narrow corridor and sitting suspended there (which is sometimes a last option when there's nowhere else to hide). As he falls he can also do a "drop attack' and if you tap crouch as you hit the ground you can do a "silent fall" since every stray sound counts.

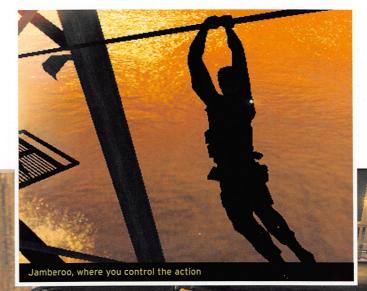
He can even jump from wall to wall to reach a place he couldn't get to in a single leap. The old guy's in pretty good nick.



notoriously short ranged. He pulls out a small fibre-optic lead and slides it under the door. The tiny camera on the end shows a guard walking by down a hall. Sam waits for five breaths before slipping through and on with his mission.

A trademark of Clancy games like Rainbow Six has always been the fine balance between action and precision. This is especially the case with Splinter Cell.

When you decide you have to fight then the game becomes about being good with the trigger and the action that entails, in the rest of the



in non-combat areas of the game the player has all the tools to control his environment and missions ...

I'll be harder than your husband... to get along with

... so if you get nailed it's not because of some guard that you have to know about in advance, it's because you just got careless



advanced and complex computer

systems. It is also the biggest

employer of mathematicians in American and maybe the world.

Interestingly enough, no statute

or laws define its parameters or

the full scope of its powers. The

then again it's also not meant to

monitor any US citizens either...

NSA isn't meant to have any field operatives, instead relying

on the other intelligence agencies to do the footwork;



What makes these features more fun is the fact that he's not helpless during any of these moves. Sam can fire as he rappels down a wall, shoot as he lies in wait doing the splits, squeeze off a few rounds as he's hanging by one arm and even let blaze as he has a hostage off balance and in a one-arm chokehold. One of the rules of survival is never

very distinct look. While many shooters, especially Ubi Soft Montreal's other project, Raven Shield, have gone for a hyper real appearance, Splinter Cell has softened many of the hard lines in the game while making the areas of light and dark much more stark. This might seem like a strange considering the realism of game's

Sam is like a big cat on the hunt: calculating, calm and patient - or at least that's how he's animated

voluntarily put yourself in a helpless position and Sam knows it all too well.

Our agent can also lean around corners, pop off a couple of shots and then duck back around, likewise he can peek through a door, shutting it if what's the other side is too uninviting. Are you starting to get a feel for Sam's approach?

If not, seeing the game in action gives you all the additional feel you need. Sam's moves have been hand-animated to capture a very distinctive way of moving. He's almost superhuman in the way he glides forward, especially when he is moving in a crouch. Even when he sprints (which sends the targeting scope bouncing) he moves with a fighter's weight but a dancer's grace. Sam is like a big cat on the hunt, calculating, calm and patient - or at least that's how he's animated.

Black and White

While the animation sells the character, it's the light and shadow effects that really steal the show. Splinter Cell has totally real-time, global, lighting effects which means how and where shadows fall is continuously calculated.

Enemies can be alerted by your shadow and you can even see the outline of people cast onto, and through, curtains or screens. The realistic lighting is vital to the dynamic stealth elements of the game.

Besides the effect it has on the gameplay, the way the light is rendered also gives Splinter Cell a geopolitical setting and deadly objectives but it actually makes a lot of sense on two fronts.

The first effect is being reminiscent of Metal Gear Solid (giving an instant visual clue to the nature of gameplay). The second, is that it's like seeing through Sam Fisher's eyes. Even with his role in special ops things are still black and white, wrong and right, for him... and they are more precise too, with the shadows deeper and light areas more exposed.

To make the most of this world of safety and peril, stealth and force, Ubi Soft have decided to give the game a third person perspective. Players can not only see Sam in action but have a field of view to either side of him. To avoid camera issues players have total camera control which feels more like first-person mouse-look than standard

camera rotation. This perspective also lets Ubi show off Sam's cool suit and character-defining tinge of grey.

Most of the time the game operates like a third person action/adventure game, but as soon as the targeting sight comes up it switches to feeling comfortably like the FPS games you know and love. Sam seems to tuck in and sight along his gun, pulling him out of the centre of the screen and leaving a big targeting sight for accurate gunplay. Once the sight goes away it's back to third-person running and rolling, and since the default attack is the close-range elbow attack you don't have the obscured or imprecise targeting to worry about.

Master Plan

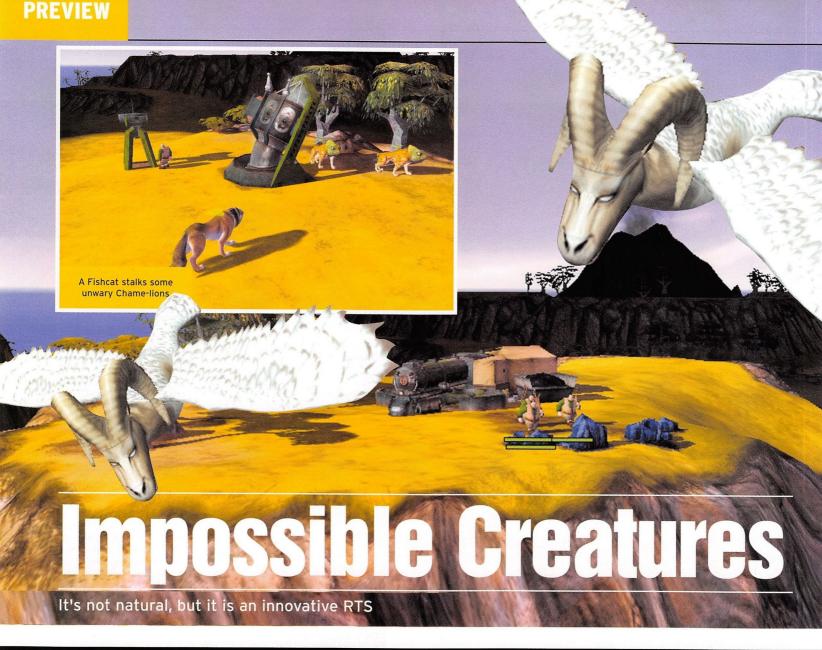
Precision isn't something that Ubi needs to worry about with Splinter Cell. In scientific usage precision refers to tightly grouped results and keeping it tight is exactly what Ubi has done. When you read the reports of Splinter Cell making a big splash at E3 and taking Game of Show at ECTS you kind of wonder why, until you get a sample of all the little things working together which whisper quality and assurance in the same way that looking into the eyes of an understated bad-ass like Sam Fisher whispers confidence and calm.

Splinter Cell is looking very impressive. The only game design question mark seems to be whether Ubi Montreal can keep the intense covert objectives varied and interesting.

The only other concern might be one of length. With no multiplayer mode, the straight-through run-time of 20-odd hours might leave players yearning for more - but, then again, if you're not into wasting time trying for the "perfect mission" then maybe you've got the wrong game...







Developer: Relic ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Available: Early 2003



ver since the seminal Dune II the RTS genre has happily cruised along. With a few exceptions we have predominantly seen games which only feature minor innovations to the successful original blueprint established by Westwood all of those years ago. There have been a few

games like Battlezone
and Homeworld
which have added
new elements, but for
the most part the
genre has settled into
what has been a very
comfortable and
successful collection
of design principles
which have seen the
RTS still a major
seller up to this day.

Impossible
Creatures, a game
which comes from the
innovative creators of
Homeworld, Relic
Entertainment,
attempts to break the
mould, adding major
changes to the genre
and offering eager
RTS gamers new
areas to experience.

Version 1: Too Complex

The basic idea for the game is that it will deliver real time battle and resource collection, while adding a plethora of new gameplay elements most of which revolve around the game's ambitious creature design system. In the early builds of the game we were given the metaphorical keys to a vast and complex genetic laboratory where we could create endless numbers of genetically manipulated creatures which contained genetic traits from any number of original beasts.

The creature design aspects of the game were complex and involving and Relic found after a lot of focus testing that

these were generally too convoluted and full of options to please most of the people who played the game. A more basic blueprint was defined as the way to go and this is the game we will see arriving sometime early next year.

The is the form that Impossible Creatures has itself mutated into and while not as ambitious as originally intended it is still looking like offering a good mix of the familiar and the innovative.

Certainly the basic gameplay feels very familiar. If you have a love of RTS like we do you can pick up the mouse and have the basics well and truly mastered in minutes. The interface feels like a well-worn glove. It is so simple to get to grips with and the rudimentary base building, research, combat and unit management was logical and intuitive if you know the genre.

In case you aren't a hardcore RTS fan, or have missed out on the information somehow here are the basics. Impossible Creatures pits you, as intrepid explorer Rex Chance, against a megalomaniac mad

With 51 creatures and seven graftable limbslots, there are many possibilities to come up with some fearsomely freaky hybrids

scientist type, called Upton Julius, who has somehow discovered how to create an army of genetic mutants on his remote archipelago. You have also stumbled across this technology and have decided the best way to beat the villain is by using his own weapons against him.

The game has two resources you have to manage and this aspect of the design is very simple indeed. There is coal which you can gather using miners and this is augmented by electricity that naturally powers your structures. Electricity is

IMPOSSIBLE BALANCE

While some might criticise Impossible Creatures for not being as adventurous as it was first going to be it is worth pointing out that according to Relic studio head the ebullient Alex Garden this is what the masses have demanded. As Alex says, "We have tried to do two things with this game. Provide new gameplay elements which will take the genre forward in an evolutionary sense while also keeping as many elements in the game that are necessary to keep people who are familiar with RTS games coming back for more with Impossible Creatures. This involves a balance and we have had to make the game more conventional as product testing found we were alienating some players who just wanted to stick with a more traditional RTS focus."



How about a rhinoceros with the head of an alligator? Massive armour, huge jaws and a decent charging speed. Now that's made to eviscerate!

generated using special buildings like lightening rods which draw power from the environment. There is also technology to develop which gives you access to new buildings and enhanced units.

Welcome to the new zoo

The basic RTS elements are all there in this game, but the real fun is in combining different animal types by mixing their DNA and coming up with new and powerful hybrids. At first there are few animals at your disposal so the units you can create are quite limited, but before long you are mixing electric eels with hyenas giving you a fast assault units with an electric shock attack. Don't like that? OK then how about a rhinoceros with the head of an alligator? A creature with massive armour, huge big jaws and a decent top speed when charging! Now we have something which was born to eviscerate!

There are also swimming creatures such as whales that you can incorporate into your designs by grafting a tail onto which then gives them an amphibious capability. Birds add another element to the mix

your land units

as you can bolt wings on to monkeys and sharks for a new type of attack unit again.

With 51 creatures and seven graft-able 'limb' slots you can use to tack on appendages the possibilities are pretty amusing and you will be able to come up with some fearsomely freaky hybrids.

Mutant battlefield

The game will see you fighting for control of different climate zones too, so some creatures which fare well in the desert will prove total wimps in the middle of the snow, so you will have to mix your forces with this in mind too.

The way you get access to new creatures in the single player campaign is well thought out too. Instead of just being given new DNA or having to research it plucking the data out of thin air you have to hunt donor animals in the wild.

You do this by sending Rex out with a dart gun and getting him to tranquillise animals that you hadn't encountered previously. You shoot them in the posterior

with your dart gun and then sample their DNA that you can then add to your everdiversifying gene pool.

Um... got any

schmackos dear?

This may sound like a totally new idea, but hard-core RTS fans might remember the promising Bullfrog game Gene Wars which was released in the mid 90s, which did similar things.

So when it comes to genetic blending

Impossible Creatures might not be as new an idea as most suspect, but it is still infinitely better realised than Gene Wars so we are salivating nonetheless.

The many different creatures you can create all move very fluidly and it is obvious that Relic have done their homework when it comes to the eye-candy as the environments are colourful full of lighting tricks and translucent water.

Impossible Creatures has a sense of fun and unpredictability which should make it one of the RTS releases to look out for early next year.





Developer: Dice Publisher: Microsoft Distributor: Microsoft Available: Christmas 2002





ally car driving is an amazing sport, dominated by a bunch of suicidal Scandinavians - and one flying Scotsman. These guys don't seem to understand the madness of driving around narrow, blind corners on bumpy gravel tracks at speeds of over two-hundred kph - sideways. And all that in what is basically a suped-up, three hundred and fifty horsepower hatchback! Modern rally drivers are either endowed with tennis-ball sized marbles, or they're just plain mad. But now, all of us sane people who only possess standard everyday marbles, can enjoy the thrills and spills of world class rally car driving too - thanks to a steady stream of first class, dirt-based driving titles hitting PC gaming shelves. RalliSport Challenge is almost ready to power-slide into the line-up, but with Colin McRae Rally 2, Rally Masters and Rally Trophy being just a few of the preestablished titles available, this direct

Rallisport will not be a fastidious simulation; instead it will appeal to casual cyber-drivers and arcade speed freaks

Xbox port may have a tough time trying to win over a devoted PC crowd.

Bigger is better, right?

The first thing to note about RalliSport, is that it is enormous. The marketing beta arrived spread over no fewer than three CDs, each of which is packed solid resulting in an incredible 1.4GB installation. The final release may be available on DVD-Rom as well as - or instead of - a bunch of standard CDs, but either way, it's going to engulf a considerable section of your hard-drive.

RalliSport will feature a simple and intuitive menu system, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be efficient. The current menu system is a little cumbersome, sometimes forcing the user to cycle through numerous options in order to select the one they want. This menu system is a direct indication of the game's console origins, but hopefully the Microsoft development team will fine-tune this aspect of the game for the PC prior to its final release.

In order to succeed as a PC title, RalliSport is going to have to offer users something innovative. This is a difficult task, especially considering that there are so many other rally games on offer. RalliSport certainly will attempt to offer variety, as it will feature multiple game modes that are going to present the player a slew of different options (including standard Rally, Hill Climb, Rally Cross, and Ice Racing). It will be possible to play any of these races in Time Trial, Career or Online modes. In Single Race mode, there are three other cars on the stage with the player, unlike real rallying where drivers must beat previous best times. But Rally Cross, like in real life, will feature multiple cars in Career mode.

WILL IT RUN ON MY...?

The graphics are scaleable, so the title will be playable on a range of systems, but just like any other game, you just can't have all the eye candy if you don't have the hardware to back it up. PC speeds and capabilities are, as always, sky rocketing at an incredible rate. Although the latest whiz-bang consoles are usually slightly superior when first released, it never takes the PC long to catch up - and then surpass them. Set up wisely, RalliSport will deliver the best dirtbased visuals available at a smooth frame rate, although the exact system specs have yet to announced.



The final release may be on DVD as well as a bunch of CDs resulting in a 1.4GB installation. Either way it's going to engulf a considerable section of your hard drive

Lancia Delta (Not to mention the Nissan Skyline GTR, what is up with that? - Ed). Many of the standard rally cars will also be available in special Hill Climb versions that will look and handle quite differently. Each of the cars will be modelled with superbly high polygon wire-frames and accurately detailed textures.

There will be a hefty selection of authentic rally cars, including specific Hill Climb machines, such as the Toyota

new Volkswagen Beetle and classic

There will be a hefty selection of authentic rally cars, including specific Hill Climb machines, such as the Toyota Tacoma and Metro 6R4. Each of these cars will have specific handling characteristics, although these could do with a bit of tweaking before the game goes gold.

Although each of the cars is

noticeably different to drive,
this difference is probably not
pronounced enough, even
for an arcade game.

Ram anything

you want
RalliSport will
definitely not a be
simulation,
although
the only

rally

You may need to offer a bribe to get it registered

game that could currently be counted as a true hardcore sim is the Grand Prix Legends inspired, 'Rally Trophy'. Even though some other titles also feature believable physics, none have employed an accurate damage model (such as the one in NASCAR Racing 2002), and even when the cars do get banged about a bit - or end up on their roof - most supposed rally 'sims' give the player the extremely 'arcadey' option of resetting the car. RalliSport will be no exception. Not only is the game destined to ship with an extremely forgiving damage model that is more visual than anything else, it also allows easy resetting of the car, not only if you roll but also when you stray from the track.

Fast 'n' Furious

Of course, it is quite unfair to criticise a game for not being a simulation when it's not even attempting to be realistic! The superb suspension model and special effects might give the game a realistic visual appeal, but the actual driving physics will lean much more toward an arcade game. RalliSport will definitely not be a fastidious simulation; instead it is aiming to appeal much more to casual cyber-drivers and arcade speed freaks. Naturally this does not mean all the fun stuff like power-slides, handbrake turns and challenging road surfaces have been left out, quite the contrary. These things will be simplified and exaggerated. In order to master the thrill of flying sideways around icy roads, you're not going to have to undergo exhaustive practise or purchase expensive racing peripherals, as is the case with many full blown sims.

Xbox graphics on a PC!

As one may expect from an X-box port, the real strength of RalliSport is inevitably going to be the graphics, and this is immediately apparent after only a few moments on the dusty track, despite the fact that the beta version is still minus several effects. It's beyond question that RalliSport is destined to be an awesome looking game, and the visuals are looking to challenge the best that are currently available in bush bashing driving titles. When porting the game, Microsoft has specifically strived to keep the title as close to the Xbox version as possible, and even though this approach may have some downsides on the PC, graphic quality is certainly not one of them.

Sorry to say, it's doubtful that this title will feature real life sound samples, and the sound effects will almost certainly suffer as a result. To my ear, the engines sound a little too high pitched, and too similar to each other. Real rally cars have very raspy, distinctive sounding engines, and this is one area that could possibly do with a little touch up before RalliSport hits the shelves. Don't misunderstand, the sound effects are very far from 'bad', but in order to fully compliment the gorgeous graphics, a little amendment is perhaps required.

Overall, RalliSport will be positively welcomed into the PC games world. The title will offer beautiful graphics and a trouble-free, exhilarating physics engine, as well as a heap of authentic cars and realistic tracks. Look forward to this one.

Victor Webster

HEROES It wasn't so long ago that

industry commentators were touting the return of the RPG but who would have thought those elements would become so prevalent? Not only do ships in Haegemonia achieve a higher veteran status for successfully surviving combat encounters (rather like experience) but "Heroes" will occasionally offer to join you. Each one comes with a different set of skills that greatly enhances whatever area they're placed in. A hero scientist is best placed on a research colony where he will greatly increase research while a Hero with skills in navigation and combat would best serve on your strongest ship and will improve speed and damage.

Haegemonia

Haegemonia: /hayj-a-moh-nee-a/ n. The unholy love-child of MOO2 and Homeworld?

Developer: Digital Reality ■ Publisher: Wanadoo ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Summer 2002/3

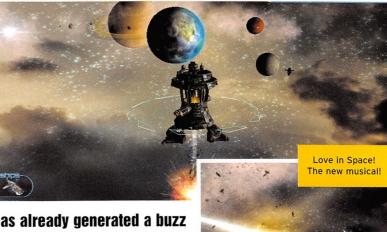
anadoo aren't renowned for the quality of their releases. A bad run of French adventure games that nobody really understood, or cared about, categorised it as a budget title publisher. Although this may have been the case in the past, forget all of Wanadoo's previous releases - this game is definitely worthy.

Haegemonia has already generated a certain buzz online because of its quite exceptional graphics but after a quick game you soon realise that it's more than just a pretty face. Actually, it's a rather interesting derivation of the 4X (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate) genre of game made popular by Masters of Orion 2 (MOO2). To be more accurate, Haegemonia isn't entirely a 4X game, instead, it is an excellent merging of the RTS elements of Homeworld with the planetary management and build tree of MOO2 or Imperium Galactica (IG). It's not surprising then to learn that Digital Reality was the team responsible for the two Imperium Galacticas

Essentially, in the single player game, you need to complete a series of missions along the lines of colonisation, spying and combat. Like 4X games, colonisation is vital in order to gain enough resources to build new ships and weapons as well as allowing for income through the taxation of workers. Colonised planets also allow you to set how much of the population is

and how much is devoted to research.

Like all good strategy games, research is an essential element and an area where Haegemonia doesn't disappoint. This is mainly due to the fact that the technology tree allows for the researching and building of over 200 different inventions that include: ships,



Haegemonia has already generated a buzz due to its graphics, but you soon realise that it's more than just a pretty face

equipment, quantum weapons, proton weapons, ion weapons, missiles, planetary defences, sociology and spying.

Combat so far is visually amazing but can tend to be a little slow. A rather annoying nuance is that slower ships don't really make any effort to manoeuvre and faster ships don't match speed with anything slower, but rather make a series of attack runs that can become tedious. Still, there's plenty of time

polished and have a far less "Rambo" feel to them - that's to say, not every

situation requires the destruction of something. Certain missions have a nice "realistic" feel to them. Instead of destroying vessels, sometimes it's necessary to only damage them or fire a warning shot. In game NPCs also seem to have an aversion to war, which is rather interesting and the professional, polished dialogue reflects this and gives the game a certain dignity.

Graphically Haegemonia is stunning. Taking full advantage of DirectX 8.1 and utilising hardware vertex and pixel shaders there is an abundance of detail that will universally appeal. All textures sizes are appropriately high res and nice touches abound such as planets having light/dark sides and pixel shader intensive explosions that are a glorious sight to watch. The Vertex shader has also been dutifully employed and produces some breathtaking lighting effects. Slightly disappointing though is that the planets of each solar system are too close together which spoils the immersive atmosphere of the game.

Many strategy game fans have long dreamt of a real time version of MOO2, or at least a more free flowing space opera-esque game that expands upon the inimitable Homeworld. Breath easy, this is exactly what Haegemonia is.

Jere Lawrence









In addition to offering what's hoped to be the most faithful simulation of modern air combat, a central focus for Lock On has been fun gameplay. All missions will convey to the player a sense of purpose and due to a large dynamic campaign generator your actions will most definitely affect the outcome of the war.

agle Dynamics, the fine people responsible for Su-27 Flanker and Flanker 2.0 are busily cranking out code again, but this time it won't be Russian jets but rather an assortment of modern fighters. If you're an old-schooler like us here at PCPP just think Birds of Prey for the Atari ST/Amiga from way back in 1991 and you will have a very good idea of what Lock On is offering.

Initially, Eagle had plans for Lock On to further the Su-27 franchise with the introduction of the Su-39 ground attack jet. Being big flight sim fans however they discovered from the forums that there was a large player base that wanted to fly the A-10 Warthog. Eagle took note, saw it as an excellent opportunity and included the plane. There wasn't however a US counterpart to the Su-27 and thus the F-15C was added.

In all, Lock On offers you the opportunity to fly 8 different aircraft. The A-10A Warthog; F-15C Eagle; Su-27 Flanker B; MiG-29 Fulcrum A; MiG-29 Fulcrum C; Su-25 Frogfoot; Su-39 Frogfoot; Su-33 Flanker D.

Regional Conflict

The Lock On conflict takes place in the regions surrounding and incorporating the Black Sea region depicting a hypothetical modern day war in Eastern Europe. Detailed modelling of the Crimea and Eastern Caucuses will be included and the geography of the region encompasses large agricultural areas, foothills, and towering mountains. There will be a lot of geographical variety for the player to experience.

Skill Scalability

Expanding on the last topic, Eagle understand that not everyone in the world is a Flight Sim enthusiast and have added a number of difficulty options to make the game more fun for beginners. To achieve this there will be different realism levels ranging from arcade action to the most accurate flight simulation available for a PC ever.

For realism buffs, Lock On will feature: unique characteristics and flight nuances of each aircraft; real calculations for thrust and fuel consumption in regards to speed and altitude and

aircraft, Lock On will also feature a host of ground vehicles that includes: 47 types of anti-aircraft missile, gun

systems and early warning radars; 50 kinds of ground vehicles that include tanks, artillery and SAMS. There are also 140 different types of missiles, bombs, and rockets available to the aircraft.

Dynamic Battle Generator

Called the Dynamic Battle Generator, this system will create missions based on the results of previous missions. Adding a strategic element, the war zone is divided into individual regions and it is the player's goal to conquer each region using a limited number of resources. Hopefully ending the "fail a mission and start again syndrom" you can keep taking missions to meet the goal as long as there is a plane in the arsenal to fly.

Sound and Graphics

As you can see from the screenshots, Lock On will be the most advanced Flight Sim in terms of graphics. Fully DirectX 8.1 compatible with total Vector and Pixel Shader support the game is as beautiful as it is technically accurate. 3D effects include: 3D moving volumetric clouds; 3D, volumetric explosions and fires; point source lighting; environmental lighting; specular lighting; rain; snow; environmental bump mapping and light-sourced, moving water surfaces.

Sound should be equally impressive and is said to recreate the entire cockpit experience from the whine of the turbine engines to the wind over the canopy and the hum of the avionics system. Can't wait!

Jere Lawrence



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COMING NOVEMBER









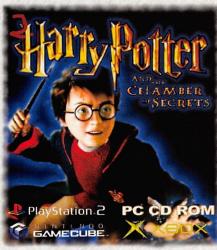


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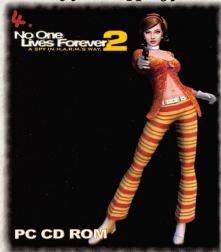




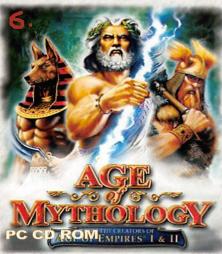




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n the world of computer games greed is NOT good. Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) were supposed to usher in a new age of gaming but they haven't and enough is enough. It all seemed to begin so well too. Ultima Online, the first majorly successful MMORPG was a delight to play. It didn't take years to reach Grand Master, nor were you ever forced to wait hours to find a group. It was a dynamic and very playable MMORPG where you never heard the terms: "camp, farmer or hell level". Of course it wasn't all good; UO was plagued with Player Killers that made most honest gamers experience a living hell and these low-lifes were ultimately responsible for the downfall of the game.

So what went wrong? The frustrating reality is that a bunch of poor excuses for developers/human beings at Verant (now Sony Online Entertainment) released a product called Everquest and collectively the video game industry was thrust into a new form of the dark ages. The problem was simple. Everquest is nothing more than a simplistic RPG combat engine that in order to advance requires the killing of numerous experience-giving monsters. This didn't seem too bad until you reached level twenty and realise that gaining each level over 20 could take as long as 26 hours. Add to this the fact that with each death you lost experience and had to recover your corpse and it became quickly apparent that it wasn't your enjoyment that was SOE's primary focus but rather your money. The problem is that 3 years on Everquest now has 400,000 players that generate 5.2 million dollars US each month and other companies see the EQ model as the pot of gold under the proverbial rainbow.

But it isn't! We as gamers need to put our collective boots up these developers' arses and demand less levelling and more gameplay from our MMORPG adventures. This time around it's Asheron's Call 2 (AC2) and although the game itself is unique enough, the levelling model is straight out of the evil, hellish design of EQ.

Actually, AC2 is a little more devious. At first the levels just fly by and you're constantly being rewarded with skill points to put into an expanding skills tree. Once you reach level 20 though it all goes downhill because the "pot of gold" principle comes into play and gaining one level will take upwards of 16 hours. Above level 30 it's even worse.

Perusing numerous MMORPG message boards it quickly becomes obvious that online gamers are sick and tired of the "experience grind" or "levelling treadmill". To use their words "We put up with it in EQ, we grumbled about it in DAoC but now you want us to go through it all again with AC2?"

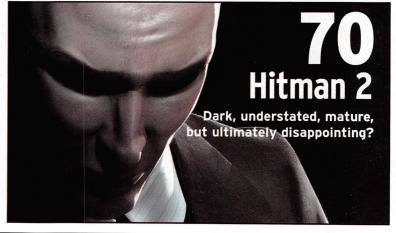
Now don't get me wrong, this is not meant to imply that AC2 is a bad game and to find out about it you're going to have to read our review. Rather it is a warning to an ever-growing number of MMORPG developers out there that if you don't find a newer, more entertaining gaming model you're going to completely burn out your customer base and destroy a very promising gaming genre.

MMORPG developers of the world, it's time to innovate, not extrapolate.

Jere Lawrence Deputy Editor jerel@next.com.au







Ironstorm

Developer: 4X Studios ■ Publisher: Wanadoo ■ Distributor: Take2 ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

The best high-action shooter on PC since Half-Life. Serious.



SYSTEM

NEED

P3-667 64MB RAM 16MB Videocard 500MB HDD

WANT

P4 2GHz+ 128MB RAM **GeForce4** 750MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.uchronia.com The alternate history website. Fine books, essays even poems. Remember, "There are no correct alternate histories. there are only plausible histories...

emember how you felt when you first played Half-Life? Remember how you began your journey through the Black Mesa complex thinking "Hey now, here's a game a bit different from the current crop of virtually identical shooters, and it's GOOD!" The experience of starting Ironstorm is exactly like that. In fact, I'm even going to go so far as to say that Ironstorm IS the new Half-Life. It's the game Wolfenstein should have been, the fantasy World War shooter that skews history and puts us in a familiar place, but then bombards us with new, original and fascinating challenges. And even the occasional fifteen inch shell.

It's 1964, but not the 1964 you and I would recognise. The 1964 of Ironstorm is a world in which the Great War - and by that I mean World War I - never ended. Well that's not precisely true - the WWI that we know was more or less subsumed by a far greater conflict that arose out of the ashes of the unsuccessful Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. A warlord called Baron Ugenberg, fashioning himself as a



No more beans for you

kind of modern-day Genghis Khan, has a vision of a unified Eurasia and will stop at nothing to make his dream a reality. The West, in a move that could all so easily have happened in the real world, sought to refinance its flagging military machine by floating it on the stockmarket. Now, rich financiers in geographically isolated regions such as, you guessed it, the USA have a vested interest in ensuring that peace is never declared - because peace would bring with it a catastrophic drop in the value of their military shares.

Europe in ashes

After 50 years of fighting, Europe is little more than a cinder. Recall the damage that was really done to France in WWI and then multiply that by ten. The entire

particularly effective as rather than just being flickering light, it actually reveals level architecture in the middle distance, so there is a real dynamic light-source in effect here, not just an animated sky texture. It's an impressive gaming experience to be trotting down a seemingly empty - if gloomy - street and then have three tanks and a whole platoon of grenadiers revealed for an instant in a lightning flash. Ambient and environmental sound is also nothing short of brilliant, from the distant sounds of shelling to the clanking of vast columns of armour moving past your position just over the next rise. Thunder rolls across your 3D positioned speakers, so it's possible to be standing at the head of a trench with the sound of tanks approaching from the west, shelling to the east, and thunder rolling back and forward across the hills to the north. For pure immersion, the only way to improve on Ironstorm is to wear some kind of bulky 3D virtual reality helmet. And we all know what THOSE do to you, right kids?

This hotel looked different in the brochure

The game's sense of apocolypse is more immediate, and it feels more like a real world than a thrill-ride

Continent is little more than a network of interlinked trenches punctuated by the shells of burnt-out cities under which military high commands cower in reinforced bunkers. Thank God the West or Ugenberg never got around to developing atomics, right?

Which more or less brings us to the present day of Ironstorm. Lieutenant Anderson, our plucky peak-capped hero, is part of a crack infiltration squad that learns of a new Heavy Water project underway deep behind Ugenberg's lines. Heavy Water, for those who don't read www.straightdope.com is an alternative method of creating an atomic weapon, using Deuterium (which is a Hydrogen with a neutron as well as a proton, making it 'heavier' than normal Hydrogen) instead of Uranium. Obviously, with no

nuclear project of their own, the West would be totally helpless to defend against or even respond to Ugenberg's atomics, and so the only option is infiltration and espionage.

Anderson is a second-generation combatant. He was born on the front line and he's lived his whole life in a trench, in no man's land, or in shell craters nursing the bits of what used to be his friends.

Ironstorm is fantasy, but it tries to be as realistic about that fantasy as possible. Every object in the game is designed to appear like the result of 50 years of shell-shocked military field research and

TANK ON TANK ACTION!



Ironstorm has learnt well from its contemporaries. The likes of Halo and Medal of Honor, with their scripted but interactive battles clearly provided inspiration for how the action in Ironstorm was going to unfold. Early in the game, James goes Over the Top with the boys in blue, and gets mixed up in a vicious man-to-man skirmish in the ruins of a quaint little French cottage. But later comes one of the highlights of the game: the tank battle in the Wolfenberg Town Hall square. First, James must disable the USIII tank guarding the square by throwing mines into its treads, a-la that scene



in Saving Private Rvan with the sticky bombs. Then, he must lure a much larger tank from its guard post in front of the nearby Ugenberg camp Running back to the square, James must then jump into the turret of the USIII and blaze away at the battle tank as it lumbers into view. More satisfyingly, James then gets to shell the living snot out of the snipers who have been whittling away at him from their positions above the square. It's a great moment in World War flavoured gaming, and part of what will ensure Ironstorm's place in our next Top 100.

development. Nothing is shiny and new, everything has some kind of dent in it. Some technologies haven't evolved significantly since 1914. Artillery is still pulled around by horses, but now it has rangefinding technology bolted to the barrel. Sub-machine guns have been haphazardly put together in the field, so while they have the rapid-fire ability of their mounted brethren, they still suffer from problems that plagued the original









Oh yes, NOW you miss HIH



WEAPONRY

ike any good action-heavy shooter, Ironstorm offers the player a wide selection of weapons, but gives a slightly different take to the inventory than other games. Where the likes of Wolfenstein give the player ten weapons which they collect during play, starting off with a humble pistol and ending up with everything from a rocket launcher to an experimental tesla cannon Ironstorm only allows James to carry five weapons at a time, plus grenades. sabre, a silenced pistol, a shotgun and a sniper rifle make up James' basic inventory, and all of these weapons are given to him at the outset. As an infiltrator, he is sent into battle fully armed, not airdropped in the middle of a major offensive packing a slingshot. James can also carry a sixth 'heavy weapon, and it's the way this is handled that really sets Ironstorm apart. Early on he gets a heavy sub-machine gun, prised from the dead hands of one of his fellow soldiers. It's a rapid-fire weapon but not very accurate. Later, he can exchange it for the Russo-German equivalent, an SMG of the same calibre but with a smaller clip and slower fire rate. However, this gun is equipped with a scope with allows James to engage in some medium-range rapid-fire sniping. Even later in the game James can acquire a much more advanced SMG with a bigger clip, a recoil-damped stock, and an even better scope, offering the best of the Allied and Ugenberg standard SMGs. As well as the SMGs, James can also get his hands on a grenade launcher and, best for dealing with boss characters, an RPG launcher with an impressive fire rate. Ironstorm's arsenal feels well-considered and necessitates unique tactical and strategic decisions, since James can





gives the Russo-German forces constant propaganda-laden updates on the state of their conflict. There are also primitive 'email' terminals that inform the player of changes in battlefield conditions ahead.

The Half-Life experience

Which brings us, at long last, to the gameplay. Ironstorm, like Half-Life, is something very close to the perfect first-person narrative. To be honest, Ironstorm doesn't have the same sense of events unfolding around you beyond your control or initiative, like Half-Life, but its action is on a much grander scale, its sense of apocalypse is all the more immediate, and it feels much more like a real world rather than an action thrill-ride where every sector of the research facility seems designed to provide jumping puzzles for environment-suited research nerds.

The level designers at 4X Studios deserve extra special praise. While not up to the astoundingly detailed and feature-rich standard shown in Deus Ex, each map nevertheless has a logical layout, with items and enemies placed in sensible positions. For instance, if James is low on health, he should look around for a sniper in an overhead window, take him out, then access his building and climb up to the sniper's nest. As you would expect, he will find a cache of ammo, a sniper rifle, and a couple of health kits.

Again like Half-Life, James will often come upon battles that are not his own, whether they be nasty street-to-street skirmishes between Ugenberg and Western troops, or gallant over-the-top charges where sixteen brave Britishers get instantly mincemeated by MG bunkers as soon as the whistle blows. And also like Half-Life, Ironstorm is full of beautifully choreographed set-pieces, such as the tank-vs-tank battle in the Wolfenberg Rathausplatz (see boxout).

Artificial Intelligence

In terms of James' opponents, we frequently bemoan the fact that even though Half-Life was released nigh on four years ago now, no developer since has bothered (or been able) to recreate the feeling of fighting an intelligent foe like Half-Life's marines. Well, Ironstorm is the closest yet. True, there's not quite the same level of heart-in-your-mouth trying-tooutguess-their-next-move in the pitched battles James frequently runs into, but this is partly to do with the kind of conflict being fought in the Ironstorm world. But enemies do form



As an infiltrator, James is sent into battle fully armed, not airdropped into the middle of a major offensive packing a slingshot

packs,

The latest cold sore ointment ads: aggressive



fall back to find reinforcements, duck for cover, pop up and shoot and then duck again, find new cover for themselves when James flushes them out, and they also try to locate gun emplacements and heavy MGs which they will man and then start blazing away with. Occasionally though, a soldier will remain standing stock still even as his partner is gunned down in a hail of bullets, although we might suspect he's just frozen, hoping that the shooter hasn't seen him - nah, let's not be apologists, he should at least duck trembling for cover.

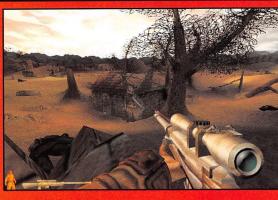
On a side note, the only real 'flaw' with the game is that the quicksave function is absolutely vital, as James will frequently amble obliviously around a corner and get instantly picked to bits by snipers. But once again, in real war, this is quite realistic. Remember folks, check all your quadrants, and every time you see an open upstairs window, it's probably worthwhile putting a couple of grenades through it.



He's behind the times

The delivery of Ironstorm's plot is nothing short of excellent. Just when you're starting to get sick of endless maze-like trenches, it's out into the open streets of a blasted town. From there, it's down into mysterious research labs, underground bunkers and even a train speeding across the Siberian wastes. James must engage in every conceivable battlefield condition from bunker assaults to firing rockets at helicopters, to laying mines for unsuspecting tanks, cleaning entire city blocks of snipers, crawling through the muck to avoid detection from guard towers, posing as a prisoner and riding in the back of a truck only to get ambushed by guards This most of all is what sets Ironstorm up





And what's more, it's not crap. 4X Studios is part of the much larger 4X Technologies, a company specialising in 3D applications. PHOENIX 3D is its already matured 3D rendering technology, which the company usually on-sells to other developers. In feel, PHOENIX is most reminiscent of Quake3, which can only be to 4X's credit. Textures are well defined and very detailed, and in the necessarily drab and greyish environment of a war-torn world, buildings and terrain nevertheless maintain a brightness and distinctiveness that other engines, most notably Lithtech 2, can't seem to manage. Character models are very nicely detailed, right down to 3D belt buckles, and weapon effects such as smoke, fire and muzzle-flash all work effectively. However, the renderer is not quite as fast as Quake3, so there are occasional framerate issues and jerky moments on lower end machines. However, the framerate drop only just takes the edge off the smoothness, it doesn't really affect gameplay in any significant way, and the worst it does is show up the fact that some models don't really have that many frames of animation. The bottom line though is that PHOENIX 3D loads quickly, has excellent stability and above all looks great, particularly in large open areas. It's an ideal engine for a World War setting.



truly original, entertaining shooter than wasn't from id or some third-party company using id or Epic technology? Too long. But the drought is over at last, Ironstorm is here. If you take yourself seriously as a gamer, you must get it. If this is the first PCPP review you've ever read and you only bought the mag because the cover looked cool, then consider yourself advised: Ironstorm. Gaming the way it should be.

Anthony Fordham



RATING

FOR

Original concept
Flawless execution
Excellent engine and
graphics
Gripping script
Clever Al

AGAINST

Dependence on quicksave to survive

OVERALL

The best shooter for a long time, an essential addition to any serious collection

96



Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings

Developer: Turbine ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$89.95 + \$12.95US/month ■ Rating: MA ■ Available: Now

The first Next-Generation MMORPG has arrived

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII/Athlong 1Ghz+ 256MB RAM 32MB D3D Video Card 2.0GB HDD

WANT

P4B/AthlonXP 2Ghz+ 512MB RAM 128MB D3D8.1 Video 2.0GB HDD

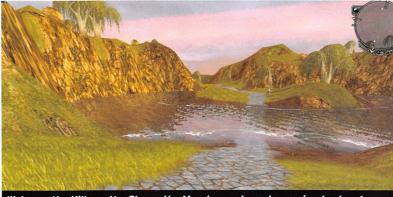
MULTIPLAYER

Only

assively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) deserve our close scrutiny because these are games where you're not only expected to pay a singleplayer sized purchase price, but also an ongoing monthly fee. You'll never own your online avatar, something the myriad of end user license agreements associated with MMORPGs constantly remind you. Given the added expense it would seem logical that this new genre would offer the ultimate gaming experience but to date this hasn't been true. Does Asheron's Call 2 break this trend? We find out.

Fans of the original Asheron's call (AC) won't know what hit them when they enter the very new world of Asheron's Call 2 (AC2) because this is nothing like the original. It's not hard to quantify Turbine's vision: AC2 is quite obviously a mix of the best parts of Diablo II and Dark Age of Camelot with the worse aspects of Everquest.

To elaborate, AC2 features an amazing and rewarding skills tree similar to Diablo II, a high end game that focuses on PvP (or



Water pretty. Hills pretty. Sky pretty. Monsters and quests - curiously absent

Kindom vs Kingdom (KvK)) like that of Dark Ages of Camelot and all the slow, lethargic levelling of Everquest. Instead of concentrating on true innovation it seems Turbine are saying "Hey, come try our interpretation of the genre. We'll make it an easy transition from the games you're currently used to."

Starting out

It begins well; character creation offers a good variety of hairstyles, facial types, clothes and features that are a vast improvement over the low poly count models of AC. Making your character is also much easier than in other MMORPGs where you had to put points into stats such as intelligence or strength. Often a new player knowing nothing of the game, would make the stats wrong for his character, which potentially would force him to re-

make his avatar again. AC2 alleviates this by only having two resource pools that are commonly shared between all races and classes. Hit Points represent health and Vigour represents mana and stamina.

This clever use of resource pools effectively alleviates problems where tanks could deliver endless damage while mages were forever having to med. Now, whether mage or melee, each will be limited to how much damage they can deliver. Once a melee runs out of vigour it can no longer perform special attacks that constitute the majority of their combat damage. Likewise, once a mage runs out of vigour it can no longer cast powerful spells. Without vigour you can still fight but base damage without specials may not be enough to kill the mob.



Full moon. You know what that means. SERVER CRASH!





He's been shafted, hahaha

Turbine, possibly with Microsoft encouragement, has gone to a lot of effort to make sure that new players are eased into the world as effortlessly as possible. You start the game in a newbie dungeon and a comprehensive tutorial walks you through combat and character management. You're also presented with three weapons: a staff; a range weapon or a sword. The different weapons represent different "classes" so to speak but anyone can use them.

133t Sk1LLz

A unique approach to balancing weapon proficiency is linking it to skills. Of the three class types, Melee, Missile and Mage, it's the weapon that connotes class. Mages must wield a staff to cast spells; melee

Fans of the original Asheron's Call won't know what hit them, because this is nothing like the original



types wield axes, swords etc and missile types wield range weapons. There are however no "class" restrictions to weapons, only racial ones and all weapon types do a similar amount of base damage; it's the wielder who makes all the difference.

Class is defined by what branch of the skill tree you put the most points into. Levelling earns a point that allows a skill to be activated. Some are passive such as

melee/missile/magic skills which increase

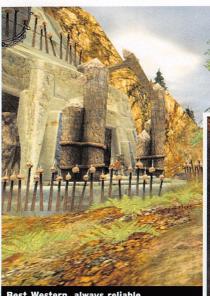
your chances to hit and evade while others are special attacks or spells. What's clever though is that it only takes one point to activate a skill and adding experience increases its power. Thus the experience from every monster killed besides going towards your overall level sits in a pool that you can raise skills

MULTIPLAYER DATA RATE

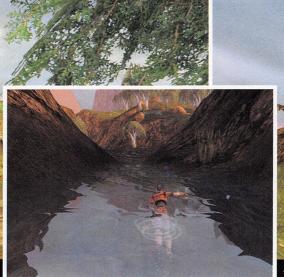
Send: 0.8kps Receive: 0.2kps per player in range

The good news for all modem users is that being an MMORPG the amount of data and timing is well within modem tolerance. A word of warning though, at 200bytes per player in range 56k modems will reach their max with only 25 players in the vicinity. The bad news for everyone though is that on cable or ADSL for anyone with a machine less than 2GHz the main factor of latency will be video performance, not network.











REVIEW

with, which keeps you progressing at a constant pace.

Races and classes

The racially based class system is quite innovative and essentially allows for different specialisations. Once you reach level 15 you can activate only one of two specialised skills branches that allow for more complex

character development.

The skills tree isn't set in stone either and hybridisation is achieved by activating a skill from another tree. A human archer might decide a nuke, heal and vigour refresh are handy and invest skill points into

invest skill points into magery at the expense of other archer skills. The choice is entirely yours and for once in an MMORPG, hybrids don't seem to suck.

Combat

HIGH LEVEL GAME

The high level game consists of epic

mobs to defeat, PvP and Kingdom vs

kingdoms in competition you can join:

Kingdom (KvK). There are three

the noble Order of Dereth; fascist

Shadow kingdom. Dereth has been

followers of different kingdoms must

Dominion and the anarchic/evil

left in a state of ruin and the

rebuild the cities through the

accumulation of resources.

True to the mould combat is pretty much what AC2 is about and what you will spend the majority of your time doing. Solo combat in beta was actually quite possible but it wasn't long until that was nerfed. Being an "online game" there is a very heavy focus on group play which is sensible and mutil about level 20 soloing

up until about level 20 soloing isn't really a problem. There might be the occasional accidental death

but for the most part you should be able to cope. After level 20 however the monsters (or mobile objects (mobs)) become much tougher and are best handled by a group.

At time of review grouping was incomplete with no kind of sharing code added for group looting. Even though the



NO BANKS, NO NPCS

Once again the world of Dereth is without banks and this time around, shops too! The upside to this is that all items can be "transmuted" into gold with just a click. The downside is that you can only hold so much in your inventory which is proving to be a nightmare for crafters, who need to collect dozens of items to make things.

whole group was required to kill the mob, the person who did the most damage got to loot - there wasn't even alpha looting. That

wasn't the worst of it though. Items are generated by the server at the time of looting to be mostly relevant to the race/class looting it. This caused no end of distress for support classes (healers and buffers) who were a

required part of the group but never damaged a mob enough to get a kill. Ultimately it's up to the kindness of strangers which often means hand me downs or nothing.

Group combat itself is standard MMORPG fair. Tanks with their higher armour class take on the mob head on while archers and mages attack from afar. Keeping the tanks alive are buffers (who can temporarily increase stats) and healers that heal the tank(s) and keep them alive. Pet summoners also send their pets in but one of the more intriguing classes is the Lugian tactician. These guys summon walls to keep the mob away from the soft creamfilled magic users and also summon turrets that secure a group position or pounds away at any mob that comes within range.

It's buffers who get the rawest deal

though as another less than stellar decision was made to make buffs short term only. While some only last seconds, the longest

It's a mix of the best parts of Diablo 2 and Dark Age of Camelot combined with the worst aspects of Everquest...

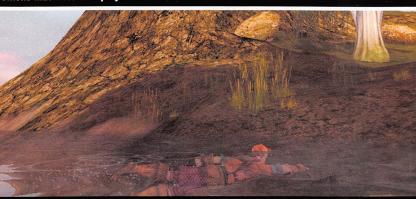
lasts only five minutes. Clicking people in your group and buffing them over and over simply isn't fun. If there was perhaps some kind of strategy to buffing mid combat this might be acceptable but there isn't. AC2 does not reward its support classes.

Monsters have made a big improvement since AC1 and more importantly, now make AI decisions based off a hate list. That's to say, instead of simply attacking the closest party member it will decide who to attack based on either how much damage is being done or how much healing has been done to the tank. If you've played EQ or DAoC you'll have a good idea what to expect.

A nice touch to group fighting and the first MMORPG to implement it is that you can be attacked by monsters in their own group. That's to say, in later levels a bunch







of Drudges (strange cat-people) will move as a group with a tank, caster and healer. Players will need to use a lot more strategy to defeat them and mobs in a group will utter (i.e. sound file - not just text) amusing comments such as "Stupid healers! Pay attention! I'm dying here!"

Player vs Player

PyP is fully incorporated into AC2. The way it works is that certain areas are designated as either PvP or non-PvP zones which seems fine. That's until you realise that the resources you need for crafting are in those PvP zones. This would appear to be another misjudgement from Turbine as players who are more inclined towards crafting are 99% of the time uninterested in PvP.

Compounding this problem are Player Killers (PKs) that in their usual cowardly self have taken to raping portals. Another oversight on Turbine's part, when you exit a portal your character appears on the other side before it's updated on your client. With no "temporary invulnerability" after portalling the PKs have often creamed you before your client updates.

Quests and dungeons

There are two types of quests in AC2. The first kind are referred to as vault quests and are a first for an MMORPG in that completing these mini dungeons gives a snippet of an overall story and a nice experience bonus. The vaults are a grand epic quest that lead your character over every area of new Dereth while instilling him/her with the history of the land and the powers that lie within it. It's not a bad idea because it's very difficult to get the average player to fully explore an online game. Other non-story related quests are given out by statue "quest heads" scattered about, or as "quest potions" dropped as loot and offer appropriate rewards for your level. Quests however can be criticised for their lack of required thinking are really tasks because you're spoon fed specific directions every single step of the way. Not one quest has a puzzle, a trap, a riddle, a maze, or any other stretching of the cognitive functions.

Experience dungeons are quite interesting in that some spawn dynamically over the game world. They're always visible from the area map and are a good way to dissuade camping though they still tend to stay around long enough that there are often plenty of people there by the time you arrive.

Amazing visuals

I could literally spend pages writing about the graphics in AC2 because as you can see



by the screenshots they're absolutely spectacular. Fully DirectX 8.1 compatible this game uses every aspect of a high end card and G4Ti/ATi Radeon users can expect to be floored by the amazing pixel shader effects in this game. Every graphical nicety you could ever want abounds. There's full bump mapping on multiple surfaces, vertex shader assisted 3D animations and some of the most amazing lighting for any game. The sun rises and sets with each passing day and the environment adjusts itself appropriately. At sunrise/sunset the sky and everything around you is bathed in a golden glow and in the middle of the day the gamma is increased to give everything an "intense sun" look including character faces which get washed out when facing the sun. Clouds move and cast realistic shadows and numerous light sources in dungeons make for incredible eye-candy.

Water is equally impressive and is a highly

You're stepping on my cuirass. And... and I like it

Ah moonlight, how sweet it makes you look

tessellated surface that accurately reflects all objects around it. Jump into the water and the numerous polygons will scatter the reflected image with amazing realism. This is the DX8.1 visuals we've been dreaming about.

Sonically AC2 has atmospheric cinematic style music that changes with what's happening. EAX is fully supported with decent spacialisation

and reverb effects. The biggest plus about AC2 sonics is the way that players can interact with each other. Loot drops often feature instruments that can be played with simple emotes. There are ten music pieces that each instrument can play and when played in a group, no matter how randomly, they still make harmonious music. One of the niftiest online moments I had in the first ten minutes of AC2 was stepping out of the newbie dungeon to watch a band of five players jamming. An excellent social feature.

Conclusion

AC2 represents the most visually amazing MMORPG to date yet but has been released unfinished with some major issues that need to be addressed. As Turbine will be releasing a monthly patch to add new content and fix known issues this will change. At its core, AC2 represents an interesting mix of Diablo II style skills based action within a conventional MMORPG combat system.

Jere Lawrence

CRAFTING

Tradespeople rejoice! Crafting actually creates desirable items and there are hundreds to be made from weapons, armour, crafting tools, staves, dyes and alchemical vials. Crafting skill is raised through repetition and with each level new recipes become available. Ingredients are either sourced from raw materials (wood, stone, iron, acid and crystal) which are further refined or extracted from existing loot items. Items can also be imbued with an effect which eventually deteriorates.

RATING

FOR

Graphics Skills system Abundance of trade skills

AGAINST

"Big Rig" required
No fair loot code
Back on the levelling
treadmill

OVERALL

A curious melding of Diablo II and just about ever other MMORPG on the market

83



TRAVEL

Although the running speed of your avatar is way too slow - it would take forever to get anywhere at all by foot - there are portals all over Dereth that allow instant travel. To aid when no portals are around all players irrespective of race or class can activate skills for self and group porting which are all achievable by level ten. When all else fails the built in compass/radar and map greatly aid navigation.

No One Lives Forever 2



Told you there were ninjas. This one's in a trailer park. In a tornado.

Apart from some typically mundane weapons, Cate also has access to a host of gadgets and gizmos which no self respecting female spy would be caught dead without. From the lipstick camera to the body-erasing perfume to the hair spray which doubles as a welding torch, Cate is ready for any situation. Perhaps the most useful weapon is Cate's utility pistol which fires an assortment of tranguillised and dragged away. tracking devices can be planted so players can familiarise themselves with guard patrols, and surveillance



64MB GeForce2

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

DON'T WASTE MY TIME

The control system in NOLF2 is a joy to use. The right mouse button is employed to perform all action functions from searching bodies to rifling through drawers to using a code breaker. Passing the cursor over objects reveals where players are able to use, or potentially use (once they find them), items to bypass a gate or lock. It saves a lot of useless and time-consuming experimentation. Even better, once the button is pressed, Cate will automatically switch to the relevant item and then switch back to the weapon she was holding. NOLF2 is full of these simple yet practical features.

Enjoy it or go to prison



Fat Bastard's after me!

to go into further detail since the story follows a quite generic save-the-world kind of path, throwing in the typical plot twists to keep players guessing. Overall, NOFL2's storyline is much more consolidated than the one from the original game which often felt disjointed. Yet how NOLF2 really distinguishes itself from the FPS alsorans is the way in which the story is delivered, but more on this later.

Leave the stilettos at home

As its subtitle - A Spy in HARM's Way might suggest, this is an FPS with an emphasis on stealth. To this end, several new features have been included in the seguel. One is the ability to lean and look around corners; standard inclusion in most FPS games these days but still a welcome addition. Another is the introduction of a hide icon and meter. In certain spots - usually darkened corners of rooms or shadows cast by buildings - if the Cate remains motionless for several seconds, she becomes virtually undetectable to passing enemies. Any game capable of generating a slight increase in a player's heart rate when enemies walk tantalisingly close to their hiding spot has to be good. Apart from these two new features, players will also be able to pick up and dispose of bodies to hide their handiwork, as well as use a number of different weapons and gadgets.

classic Thief with a different setting, think again. Unlike that game with its unforgiving stealth-only approach, NOLF2 doesn't penalise players if they are clumsy or careless, or if their spy skills are more on par with Maxwell Smart than Agent 99. Instead, players are given an enormous amount of freedom when it comes to how they approach mission objectives. In the first version, many missions often ended abruptly if enemies detected the player's presence. Thankfully, the sequel is much more balanced and caters equally well for different playing styles, from the shootfirst-ask-questions later approach to less direct ones.

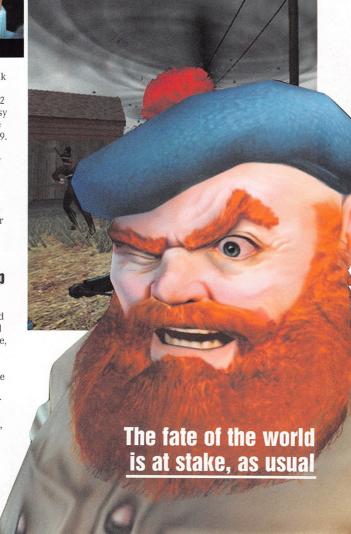
Yeah, but it's FASHIONABLE murder

Beauty more than skin deep

The beauty of NOLF2 is that players are never allowed to paint themselves into a

corner or get steered towards one method or another. Of course, some missions will require that players complete an ultimate objective - such as retrieving objects or information unnoticed. However, up to that point. players are given plenty of latitude to play the game as they please. Players will never feel like the game is





PCPP 61

NO DEATHMATCH?

Rather than offering typical FPS multiplayer modes which wouldn't have fit well with the game's style, NOLF2 features a cooperative campaign mode instead. The missions are all tied into the storyline of the single player game. So, in different missions players will work as a team to provide some reconnaissance for Cate, clean up after she has left, and even rescue her from a sticky situation. With only four missions on offer, and a moderately short single player mode (although replaying many of the missions is still fun), perhaps the most disappointing aspect of NOLF2 is that there isn't enough of it. We want more!

shoving the stealth approach down their throat. Of course, adopting a more covert approach has its benefits. Apart from being more rewarding in terms of gameplay. players will also be able to eavesdrop while guards engage in all manner of humorous conversations from shopping lists to girlfriend troubles.

If guards are alerted and come arunning, there's always the option

to dish out some lead or run away like a girl (literally). If the second approach is taken, players can use a myriad of items to deter pursuers. One is a bear trap - a most effective tool considering it's quite difficult chasing after someone when you've got a two serrated pieces of metal and-fall lawsuit or Whether you play stealth or shootslapstick comedy routine - less first-ask-questions-later, NOLF 2 painful but equally effective. allows for plenty of latitude to If guards are not swayed by these play the game as you prefer formidable weapons, the player can always

hide, wait for enemies to return to their posts and start all over again. Alarms are localised to particular sections so revealing your presence doesn't affect your approach to the entire mission.

Fifteens levels make up the overall single player campaign with three or so sub-missions built into each level. The mix of combat, stealth and puzzle-solving elements is nicely divided. Unlike the first game with its many mini-games which tended to break up the flow of both gameplay and storyline, NOLF2 follows a more traditional FPS path. The result is that the missions feel like parts of an overall package rather than an

Some players might find the going slow at first as the initial few missions, whilst still solid in every respect, don't really tend to light a bonfire of interest. Players should "persevere" because once the game gets going from about a third of the way through, you're in for one heck of a ride. Perhaps the only other criticism which could be levelled at the overall mission structure is that certain parts are entirely too linear. A few missions (and there really are only a few) rely too heavily on the findand-fetch routine. Players will find themselves having cleared a stage of enemies but unable to progress to the next portion because they failed to locate or pick up a hidden item in a previous mission. The result is some backtracking

Spy, seductress and outdoor chef

which is made more frustrating by long-ish load times between missions and levels, and some massive environments.

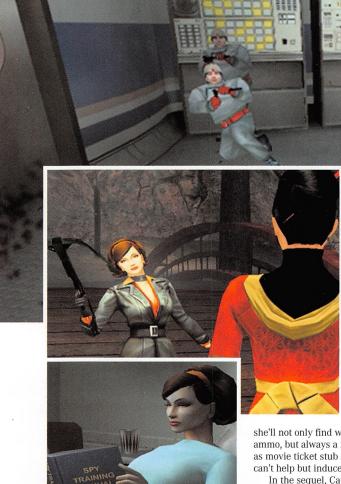
She's got skills

It's a good thing that NOLF2 introduces a new skill system to make exploration and thoroughness on the player's part that much more satisfying and useful. Scattered throughout the game are a host of intelligence items such as maps, blueprints and memoranda. Some are useful to mission objectives, others are included to simply provide some light comic relief. All usually have a skill point value. Completing hidden bonus objectives earns even more points. Points are then used to upgrade Cate's abilities in various different categories so that players can tailor her skills to adjust to their playing style.

Skill points can be spent to improve Cate's shooting accuracy, increase her speed when searching bodies or decoding encrypted documents, allow her to carry more ammo, or provide her with increased armour. The overall effect of this RPG element, which is tending to crop up in more and more games of different genres these days, is mixed. On the lowest difficulty setting, the effect of an increase in skills is negligible. In fact, it's actually quite possible to complete the game without touching any of Cate's skill categories. Possible, but of course far less rewarding and enjoyable. On the higher difficulty settings, the skill elements become more critical. How fast Cate picks a lock or how steady her shooting arm is could mean the difference between success and failure.

The overall difficulty level in NOLF2 is progressive. Having become accustomed to the controls and refined their stealth techniques in the early stages of the game, players will be put through the toughest spy testing this side of Quantico in the later stages. That said, the AI is a bit up and down but generally very good.





Whilst on patrol, guards will react to the slightest noise, notice footprints left in the snow and became alarmed when messy players leave behind dead bodies. If players push their luck or are careless, guards will investigate further, opening doors and turning on lights in a game of cat-and-mouse. It's all edge of the seat stuff, creating a very tense atmosphere.

Tucked in with a good book. Mmmmn..

In combat, enemies will seek out cover, run to sound the alarm to call reinforcements, and work together to attack in concert, often employing flanking manoeuvres. Different guards react differently too, so whilst ninia guards will somersault and bounce around to avoid bullets, Russian troops will drop to a prone position and lay down bursts of covering fire for comrades. How the wacko mime guards react... well, to say too much would spoil the surprise. Yet the AI still has its moments of stupidity and downright absurdity. For instance, guards on balconies, watchtowers, or other elevated positions will often fail to react when a firefight is occurring immediately below them, remaining motionless as statues. On the other hand, guards will sometimes spot players when they're halfhidden behind a rock 100 metres away amidst falling snow.

No laughing matter

The sense of humour that pervades the entire game is one of its strongest assets. Whilst not quite on par with a decent Seinfeld episode, the jokes are subtle and witty enough to elicit everything from a

chuckle to oneself to uproarious laughter. They rarely induce any rolling of the eyes or cringing of the shoulders. As Cate searches the bodies of enemies.

I hate fast food employees

she'll not only find weapons and extra ammo, but always a ridiculous item, such as movie ticket stub or snotty hanky, which can't help but induce a grin from the player.

In the sequel, Cate is now an established agent so the smart-mouthed feminist angle has been toned down a bit. Whether this aspect annoyed players of the first game or not, the overall humour is as clever and witty as ever. There are plenty of one-liners, caustic remarks, and subtle innuendo, all delivered with the same flair.

NOLF2's graphics are jaw-droppingly gorgeous, regardless of which of the three preset display modes players choose. Running on Lithtech's Jupiter engine, the game has a semi-cartoonish look which suits the style of the game perfectly. Players who downloaded the demo of the Ohio trailer park level will have gotten a taste of how impressive the environments are and how they mesh so well with the gameplay, The other locales which Cate journeys to - Japan, Russia, India, Antarctica - are all likewise dazzling. Players will notice some occasional clipping problems but otherwise the engine is remarkably stable and quite capable of rendering huge detail-filled interior and exterior environments.

Animation

Movement of in-game characters is equally fluid and superb. Enemies behave in a most lifelike fashion if players have the patience to stop and look. Watching enemies tumble down stairs after being shot or slowly keel over (as opposed to being knocked over like a piece of furniture) after being hit with a tranquilliser dart will remind players of the realistic animation. Yet with all these terrific features the best part of the game remains its famous cutscenes featuring perfect lip-syncing and amazingly genuine facial gestures and eye movements. In the

original the cutscenes used to drag on and border on tedious. The ones in the sequel remain equally pleasing to the eye, but the information is relayed much more quickly.

Background music is used to great effect in movies but often overlooked in games. In NOLF2, however, it really comes to the fore. As the action alternates between adrenalin-pumping scenes to quieter moments, the dynamic music likewise moves in sync, creating that added bit of atmosphere. The main theme is extremely catchy and will likely have players softly whistling it to themselves in embarrassing moments.

If there's any doubt that Cate
Archer has dethroned Lara Croft as
the gaming world's number one pinup girl, this game proves it. NOLF2
is everything a sequel should be
and probably more than even
Cate's most smitten fan could
have hoped for. The amazing
depth to the gameplay,
beautiful graphics and sound,
and stylistic presentation, all
tied together with a
wonderfully droll sense of
humour, make this game the
complete package.

Derek Lee

WHERE ART THOU, KIT?

Fans of the original game will be disappointed to know that a new actress provides the voice for Cate in the sequel. Yes, Kit Harris is gone and in her place, Jen Taylor steps in. Console players will recognise her as the voice of Cortana from Halo. The one-liners are delivered with the same aplomb, but sadly missing some undefinable quality. The rest of the voice talent is brilliant and lend plenty of personality to the already colourful characters. Easily annoyed players might find that the overly camp accents are pushed a smidgen too far.

RATING

FOR

Deep gameplay
Extra challenge and reward
Full of personality

AGAINST

Load times

Disappointingly short Camp humour a bit overdone

OVERALL

Even if the style isn't your cupcake, FPS action doesn't get much better than this.

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Starfleet Command III

Developer: Taldren ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Distributor: Activision ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Q4

Tactical Starship combat Next Generation style

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-667 64MB RAM 16MB Videocard 500MB HDD

WANT

P4 2GHz+ 128MB RAM 750MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

trekbbs.com Be among your own kind, and chat for hours about all aspects of Star Trek including the ones you probably didn't want to know about. ithin the strange mixed up world of computer gaming the "sleeper" is potentially one of the most satisfying games to discover. For those not clued up, a sleeper is a title that doesn't come attached with a marketing company that constantly bombards gamers with hype, buzz and (shockhorrordrama) untruths. Instead, these are games that sell on their own merits and more importantly, increase their sales through word of mouth. This was definitely the case with Starfleet Command and those who discovered this tactical utopia were rewarded with hours of gaming bliss, some however just "didn't get it".

The Good, The Bad

At its very core, the Starfleet Command (SFC) games offered an extremely addictive tactical combat experience that was challenging, fun to play and unique in that it was a starship sim that "felt right". For fans, it's fortunate that the series has made it to its third incarnation as the SFC games were quite complex with a very



rectified in version 3.

The problematic paradox therefore, the good and the bad so to speak, is that yes indeed, Taldren have fixed the criticism drawing problems, but that's really all. The tutorial has been appropriately smartened up: missions are more accessible with messages that guide and remind you of your destination and homing missiles have been removed - much to the relief of many online players. As an aside, missiles were included due to the fact that SFC was a conversion of the popular board game Starfleet Battles based around the ships of the original series, it may have worked on paper, but in game it



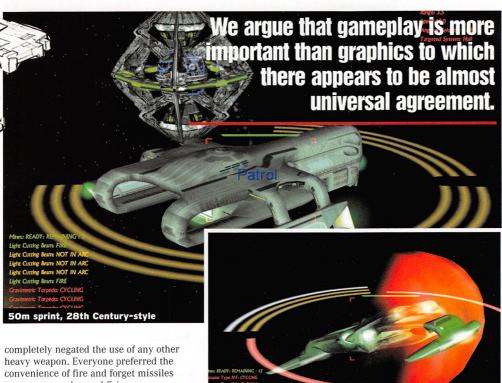
WOOT! PATRICK STEWART

Captain Jean-Luc Picard, the best Captain ever (HAH I can see the letters coming in now) lends his voice to the Federation (and even some Klingon) missions. For some this may be a draw card feature in its own right, but at the least it's nice to receive your orders from "The Man" himself.

STARFLEET BATTLES

Starfleet battles was a turn based board game in which players allocated energy to weapons, shields, or engines (as well as additional starship components) and then (if in range) fired weapons that could be brought to bear on enemy ships. The game retained the flavour of the television series and even offered solitaire missions against "monsters" like the planet killer and giant space amoeba from the original series. With a relatively large hardcore following, the enthusiasm of SFB players for the SFC games has made for excellent online play and generated enough of a user base to keep its unique gameplay alive.

l live my life one quarter-mile at a time, my daddy was killed on the circuit, you've got pretty hubcups, be my fuel injected bucket seat, you owe me a ten second ca



over manoeuvring and firing.

The Ualv

Although it's not really fair to describe SFC3 as ugly, the grim reality is that graphically it's really not that much different to SFC1 or 2. There are the new "next generation" ships but their poly count seems (despite comments from the developers that state all the model geometry is new) to be about the same as the ships from SFC1 and 2. Also, considering that next-gen ships have been available for SFC by modders for over a year, it seems somewhat inadequate that Taldren are happier to mod the graphics

rather than overhaul them.

The lack lustre graphics really came at quite a shock because in interviews we've had with Taldren about SFC3, they have been telling us about how the graphics and engine have been overhauled. Although I won't go as far as to say they were telling us pork pies, the reality is that the new graphics for SFC3 are nothing more than a few updated ship

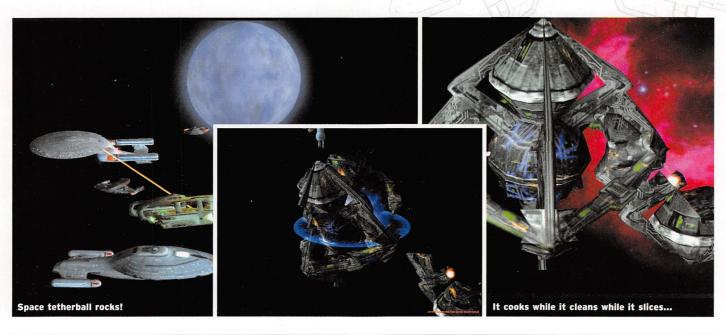
models with nextgen textures. Of the new features, the

engine glow was so subtle that it might as well not have been included and the specular highlights although quite good on the Federation ships were poor on the Klingon, Romulan and Borg craft. Damage based on hit location however was quite well done but ironically borders on being

OFFICERS

Officers originally appeared in SFC1 but were curiously absent from SFC2. Taldren, eager to quash the disappointment of their fans have once again added these characters to the tactical mix. Officers essentially add a small RPG flavour to SFC3 in that for each successful mission you undertake they will increase in level and become more skilled at what role they fulfil. A skilled weapons officer for example can fire a spread of torpedoes from a tube (as opposed to just one) or a highly skilled engineering officer can dramatically decrease repair time. One of the most important characters however is the medical officer. In SFC3, once an officer dies they're gone for good and the only way to keep them alive is with a





superfluous. The reason is that quite often you're fighting at a distance and don't really notice the damage. Likewise on your own ship the only way to see the new damage effects are to zoom in really closely.

Equally disappointing is that just like in the original, the game only runs in 16 bit colour and all the textures are extremely low res. Blowing up a ship for example is obviously meant to be a spectacular affair with the ship breaking into pieces and a massive shockwave emanating out from the explosion; but because of the poor colours and dithering (egad), the explosions end up looking washed out and uninteresting. Worse is that just before the ship breaks up there is the same half second lag (obviously as it deconstructs the 3D object) encountered in SFC1and 2 which can be quite disconcerting in battle.

Still, SFC3 has a strong following not because of its visual appeal, but rather the extremely playable tactical combat game it

offers. In this respect, fans of the SFC series will be more interested in how the game plays and won't really care about visuals. For the rest of us though, it would have been nice to see Bridge Commander quality graphics in SFC3.

Strategy

Basically in SFC3 you take command of different starships over a series of campaigns for the different races: the Klingons; Romulans, Federation (Humans 'n' friends) and the Borg. There are essentially 2 game modes to SFC3; strategic and tactical. The Hex map, also referred to as the



NO Y FOR YOU!

A disappointing omission from SFC3 is that of the Y axis - your only movement is along the Z and X axis. Although this makes the game simpler and more appealing to a wider audience, games like Homeworld have shown that three dimensional space combat is a fully realisable goal.

"Dynaverse" represents the strategic elements of the game where you can move around the different sectors of the

alpha quadrant - if there is activity in a sector, you can jump into a mission. It's important to note however that SFC3 offers two types of missions.

There are campaign critical missions that are used to progress the story of the game and involve more interesting tasks whilst

random missions tend to be along the line of "kill these pirates, defend this starbase or investigate this planet. The point of the random missions are to give the player a breather between the more difficult campaign missions as well as allowing for the accumulation of more prestige points, a type of SFC currency.

Prestige is important in SFC because without it you can't repair at a starbase, employ new crew members or even buy a new ship. Upgrading your ship is a major part of the SFC game and thankfully, ship selection has been

dramatically improved with the great news being that you can finally customise the weapons loadout of your ship - an

impossibility in previous games.

Each starship now comes with a series of hardpoints that weapons and equipment can be installed into. Customising your ship is easy, intuitive and won't intimidate even novice players. Basically, the bigger the ship, the more hard points and mass you have available for more powerful

weapons, higher capacity transporters or a better targeting computer among a plentiful amount of other upgrades.

Tactics

Keeping it all

together is an

impressive AI - if

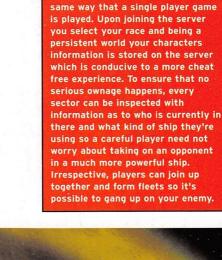
you watch it play

you can learn a lot

about the game and

common tactics

The second aspect of SFC3 and by far the most fun is the tactical game. This is where all the ship to ship battles occur and represents the majority of what you will be doing. Combat is radically different to any other game in that you are constantly attempting to vie for an advantageous position whilst



MULTIPLAY

Dynaverse 3 is the latest iteration

of the SFC multiplayer game and

remains as impressive as ever. Essentially, the Dynaverse mode of

play allows you to connect to a

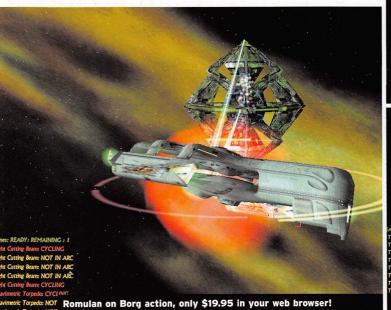
persistent world server (though

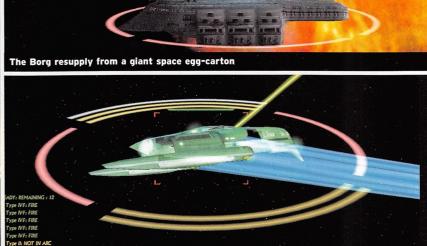
carry out missions through the

strategic interface in much the

Gamespy) where you can meet up with other players, form fleets and

unfortunately only through



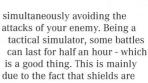


That'll teach it to be green and unexciting-looking!

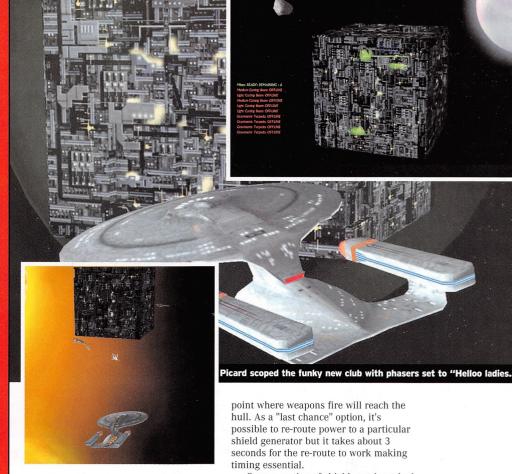
WARPING

A new feature of SFC3 is that of warping and big-ups must be headed Taldren's way for introducing a powerful new feature without breaking the game. Warping will only work from the tactical component of the game (i.e. not the strategic hex mode) and is particularly handy when it's necessary to get to a planet or more importantly, to make a quick getaway in combat. When warping, you essentially take off in the direction you're facing, really fast. The reason why it doesn't break the game is because in terms of usefulness it only really gets you away from an immediate threat. Each sector is limited in size so it's impossible to continue on and force a stalemate, besides, you quickly realise that even though warping away alleviates the immediate threat, while your shields are recharging, so too are the enemy's. That's pretty much the main reason why it doesn't severely imbalance the game. At the same time, it does allow for some new and interesting tactics.

- A few I've discovered so far include: Warping away from a just placed mine to instantly arm it
- Coming out of warp just past an enemy and firing a spread of photon torpedoes into their aft shields then performing a high energy turn to follow up with a forward volley with their aft shields down, send over the marines.



strong and with proper power management can be recharged but this involves decreasing power to other systems such as weapons. A highly defensive power management strategy will always significantly weaken your



offensive abilities making it impossible to "turtle" your way through the game.

An omission, obviously to make the game more appealing to new players is that top and bottom shields have been removed in favour of a simpler fore/aft/port/starboard shield configuration. Also, each side of the ship now has its own shield generator (that can be purchased with prestige points from a starbase - i.e. it's possible to have a different shield generator at each hardpoint) and the first stages of combat therefore involve both ships constantly trying to out-manoeuvre each other to bring down a section of shields.

Attacking carelessly and spreading all your fire across the enemy's shields won't get you very far. Instead, you have to constantly try and fire on the same shields in order to weaken them to the

point where weapons fire will reach the hull. As a "last chance" option, it's possible to re-route power to a particular shield generator but it takes about 3 seconds for the re-route to work making timing essential.

Once a section of shields are breached it's possible to beam over marines that can either destroy necessary systems (weapons, transporters etc.) or stage a full assault on the bridge and take over the ship. Other niceties include shuttles that can be launched to defend you, attack the enemy, snipe or harass.

Smart Enemies

Keeping it all together is an impressive AI system that remains consistently challenging with a plethora of interesting tactics at its disposal. Early on when you're a relatively unskilled player it's quite likely that the AI with a ship half the size of yours will quickly defeat you. The advantage however is that by watching how the AI plays it's possible to learn a lot about the game and of commonly employed tactics.

After reading this review, you may get the feeling that SFC3 is not a good game. This is not true as the criticisms made were more a reflection of the disappointment at lack of a new engine over criticism of the game itself. An ongoing conversation here at PCPP is that gameplay will always be more important than graphics to which there is universal agreement (even though I have argued that amazing visuals can also be satisfying and entertaining). The reality therefore is that SFC3 is an extremely addictive and playable game that offers some refreshing, almost old-school gameplay that is a lot of fun. It may take a little while to come to grips with the tactics and control of the game but it is well worth it.

Jere Lawrence

RATING

FOR

Extremely playable **Excellent artificial** intelligence Be the Borg!

AGAINST

16-bit graphics Steep learning curve Some missions get

OVERALL

THE BORG

In SFC3 the ability to play the Borg is a fun and exciting opportunity to exercise your darker conquistadorial side. The Borg campaigns don't feature any structured missions but instead you're placed within the Dynaverse with one on-going mission - to assimilate the whole Galaxy. Let's just say catching a starship in a super powerful tractor beam to then cruelly slice through their hull is actually quite a satisfying experience.



Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

Developer: EA ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

I feel the need... the need for a new physics engine

SYSTEM

NEED

500MHZ CPU 128MB RRAM 16MB Videocard 1.2GB HDD

WANT

2GHz+ CPU 256MB RAM GeForce3 Wheel & Pedals

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.needforspeed.
com Join the forums
and complain
bitterly about how
stupid the
helicopters dumping
napalm in the
highway is. Well,
everyone else does!



here's been so many Need for Speed games released (this is the sixth), it's a wonder that EA can think of any new ideas to keep the series fresh. The inclusion of police helicopters that drop explosives on crowded public streets isn't

explosives on crowded public streets isn't the biggest brain wave they've had, but on the other hand, car bombing does bring a new twist to the genre.

Does it look good or what?





Police helicopters that drop explosives on crowded public streets isn't the biggest brainwave EA has had but car-bombing does bring a new twist to the genre

are over twenty contemporary classics available, each brought to life with high polygon models, detailed textures and dynamic lighting and shadows. The graphical detail is so involved, you can even see the drivers inside the cars changing gears and wrestling with the steering, among many other things.

Background and track scenery is nicely portrayed with realistic textures and detailed 3D models. Flat, 2D textures

for grass, shrubs and the like, have been kept to a minimum, which gives the racing environments a truly authentic look.

Another feature that immediately stands out are the audio effects - the engines sound particularly impressive. The realistic, powerful resonance caused by these babies pushing the red line is guaranteed to bring a smile to the face of any automobile enthusiast. Each car sounds unique and genuine, which not only faithfully conveys the true potential of these super exotics, it also goes a long way in polishing off the already engrossing atmosphere of the game. The soundtrack rocks (depending on your taste in music) and the breathtaking intro movie at least deserves a mention.

Unfortunately, Hot Pursuit 2 ultimately falls short of its awesome potential.

Several small but nonetheless important

A FEW NEW OPTIONS

now all too familiar to veteran players. Hot Pursuit mode has been modified, and now includes mission-based races, but the basic objective remains "drive fast and don't get caught". Apart from the Hot Pursuit mode, the player is also given the option to compete in single events, time trials, championship rounds and "be the cop" mode. You can also race online. A new feature is "Lap Knockout" races, which disqualify whoever is running last after each lap. For a driving game, this gives quite a good amount of variety.

NFS HP2 comes with all the standard options that are

68 PCPP

DONUTS, NOT BOMBS!

There has been many a word typed on EA's NFS forums concerning the police choppers dropping flaming barrels of something highly explosive to slow speeders, and not much of what is said is good. The consensus amongst the NFS community is that this ludicrously destructive method of apprehension is going just one step overboard, especially considering police cruisers and civilian cars are often accidentally hit! But in a world where police drive Lamborghinis, and their philosophy is "ram first, question later", this latest development shouldn't come as much of a surprise. Log on to needforspeed.com, download the demo and have your say on the forums!

things have been neglected. The fact that some of these things were actually included in previous releases, yet not in this one, is quite bewildering. One expects EA to have moved forward in all facets of the game, not just graphics and sound.

Going Backwards

The first obvious step backwards is that the cars no longer feature dashboards. This is fine for those that always drove in bumper view anyway, but it will come as quite a disappointment for most others. The dashboards and interior tours that featured in all previous releases made each car feel all the more distinctive, not to mention realistic.

The force feedback effects have never been good in NFS games, and nothing has changed, as they remain weak and unconvincing.

Another disappointment is the postrace replay. Gone are all the fantastic camera angles and views that made the replay look like a Hollywood movie. Now the entire replay runs in whatever view you drove in, which completely defeats the point! This is a truly inexplicable exemption from the game, as previous NFS titles always featured highly intuitive and entertaining replay cameras. I was so taken back by this, that I even downloaded both the US and Australian demo versions in the hope that this is just

an oversight in the special press release version that I have. Apparently it is not.

Driving physics

There was a certain anticlimax to the anticipation of my first race when it was realised there has been very little improvement in the driving physics. The cars all feel and behave in more or less the same way they did in previous versions. This babyish driving model is completely unrealistic, and often makes things harder, not easier. Traction loss at the rear of the car is mostly disregarded; the wheels appear to spin and smoke, but the car handles as normal. Realistic physics are most missed when you find the car facing the wrong way after an accident. Instead of just dumping the clutch and spinning the back end around 180 in order to face the right way, you are forced to perform an annoying and cumbersome three point turn (as the tracks are often too narrow for a standard U-turn). And so it follows that mindless donuts and tyre-shredding burnouts are not an option.

A police force from hell

You start HP2 with most of the cars and tracks locked, but they can be accessed by buying them with points earned in races. The prime source of points - the 'Hot Pursuit' races - are swarming with psychopathically aggressive police that also seem unfairly fast. You can barely get a moment of undisturbed racing without constant ramming and spins caused by the overzealous cops. When driving slower cars, the 'Hot Pursuit' mode quickly turns into a tedious and extremely frustrating chore that must be completed in order to access the better cars and tracks in other modes.

On a more positive note, HP2 offers a truly exhilarating sensation of speed, and providing you have the PC grunt to back it up, the gorgeous background scenery will fly past at a smooth and consistent frame rate. For those that are not fortunate enough

to own the latest and greatest, the graphics are easily adjustable. although even on the lowest settings, a system near minimum requirements is still going to struggle.



One expects EA to have moved forward in all facets of the game, not just in graphics and sound

It's all relative

Despite the many little things that EA have neglected (or simply removed) in this NFS incarnation, the overall impression is decidedly positive. Relative to previous releases, there have been huge graphical and audio advancements. Furthermore, the sheer number of exotic cars and the twelve beautifully rendered tracks cannot be overlooked. Much of the criticism that has been fired at the game is only due to the extremely high expectations that have been set by previous NFS games.

Owners of NFS: High Stakes may choose to give this one a miss, as the only major thing to be improved since that version is the graphics, however, if you've never played any NFS game before, and have no preconceived expectations, then HP2 will impress greatly. For those people, it comes recommended as an awesome arcade racer that will especially appeal to anyone that has a sweet tooth for eve candy.











RATING

FOR

Brilliant graphics Sweet sounds Lots of cars

AGAINST

Same old physics No replay cameras No dashboards

OVERALL

An extremely good racer, although it may disappoint highly



Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

Developer: IO ■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Distributor: GameNation ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

An FPS or a puzzler? Only Agent 47 knows for sure...

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-667 128MB RAM 32MB Videocard 500MB HDD

WANT

P4-2GHz+ 256MB RAM GeForce4 750MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.hitman2.com A quality fan site with more background information, extras and downloads than you can poke a stick at. You can even download the Hitman Soundtrack.

itmen in movies used to be cool. Jean Reno as Leon in The Professional was, for many, the quintessential hitman: always calm under pressure, precise, methodical, a true, err, professional. Since then, it's been all downhill. Bruce Willis in The Jackal (yawn) and now Tom Hanks in Road to Perdition (oh please tug my heart strings once more, I just haven't had enough). Its gotten so bad that a dearth of numbers has forced many a selfrespecting crime boss or covert agency to resort to conducting business legitimately. Its been left to the gaming world to restore the cold-blooded image of the classic hitman. Thank goodness for Agent 47.

This game is obviously a sequel, but all newcomers to the series need to know is that Agent 47 is a human killing machine for hire. At least he used to be for hire before getting a bad case of morals and breaking ties with his former employers, a shadowy CIA-like agency. Having foregone his bloody past, and swapped his Desert Eagles for gardening shears, Agent 47 is living out an idyllic existence in a peaceful Sicilian monastery. Things quickly change when the local Mafia kidnap the monastery's padre and 47's friend, Father Vittorio. Needing assistance, 47 contacts his former employers and is brought out of his self-imposed retirement by their quid pro quo demands. This time around though, it's personal,

Hitman 2 is a combo first/third person action shooter where, as any true hitman knows, the emphasis in is on stealth. Players aren't allowed to carry more than a single rifle at a time, or equip themselves like a walking armoury. To assist players in staying undetected, this sequel features a new Suspicion Meter

THE 3 WOOD PLEASE

Hitman 2 features a huge selection of handguns, rifles and hand-to-hand weapons. Mr 47 has many tools to ply his trade, including a golf club, scalpel and katana. Apart from these stranger pieces of weaponry, all the usual FPS suspects are here including an excellent selection of sniper rifles. As you might expect, the heavlest Hitman 2 gets is with an M6O. Depending on your style of play, you can make the most of this arsenal or get through a mission with just a knife or silenced pistol.

that indicates how well players are going about their clandestine business.

Same dog, new tricks

To keep the meter down, Agent 47 has a few

tricks up his sleeve. Players are able to engage a stealth mode whenever a bit of surreptitious garrotte work is required. The ability to drag away and dump bodies, or switch clothes, helps further in avoiding detection. However, 47's ability to peek

through keyholes to watch out for enemies is way overdone. The game has more doors in it than a 40 story hotel.

Failing to stay undetected certainly isn't fatal but the importance of stealth becomes apparent on the game's middle and highest difficulty settings. In some missions alerting guards to your presence will bring in reinforcements to the point where there are simply too many enemies to overcome. In certain cases, drawing attention results in an automatic failed mission.

That said, although the stealth-based approach tends to dominate gameplay, it isn't the only way to approach missions. Doing otherwise just makes things that much more difficult. Less patient



Players aren't allowed to equip themselves like a walking armoury. The emphasis is on stealth.



You're smart, the Al isn't

Arnold Jago is already drafting his next letter..



players are still given the freedom to do their talking with an AK-47 as opposed to a silenced pistol. The game will even give you a rating at the end of each mission from Silent Assassin to Mass Murderer depending on your style. Hitman 2 also rewards more stealthy players with additional equipment and saves, the latter being a precious commodity considering that the game uses a limited save system.

The difficulty in staying undetected for as long as possible proves to be the biggest challenge. The AI can only be described as poor with enemies often failing to respond when there is gunfire right behind them, and simply acting as attack drones rather than working in unison. Dodging and ducking for cover is rare with enemies preferring to stand and deliver. By and large, the AI tends to rely simply on force of numbers, sending enemies pouring to vour location as soon as vou've been detected.

There is a nice overall storyline which ties the missions together and offers a few surprises at the same time. However, the overly similar feel of

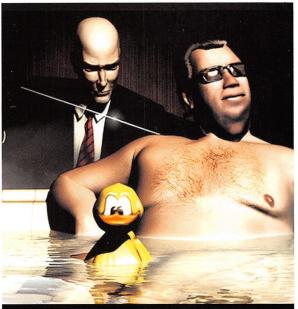
the missions creates the risk of players asking in an indifferent tone, "Yeah, topped that guy. Who do you want done next?". Regardless of where the target is located, the missions all roughly follow a set routine: reach a rendezvous or supply point, collect your equipment, bypass or take out a security detail, eliminate the target without being detected, and then make your way to an exit point. A small mix of stealth versus action-heavy missions goes some way to providing variety but it still isn't quite enough.

Regardless of how players approach each mission, overcoming the difficult odds amidst the knife edge tension which the game creates proves to be enormously satisfying. However, it should be pointed out that overall. Hitman 2 is really designed for players who enjoy thinking through a plan of attack before diving into the deep end. The game allows players to think of and try many different approaches to missions without becoming frustratingly repetitive.

This gives the game a bit of added life but once players have sussed out maps and enemy locations, there just isn't that extra bit of depth to keep you coming back. Given that the initial play through is relatively short, and with no multiplayer feature to extend longevity, there really isn't a whole lot of value for money on offer here.

Solid but not spectacular

Hitman 2's graphics are very good without quite being mind-blowing. There are 21 missions in all, taking players to



Now why is this turning me on? Must be the duck

a variety of locales ranging from Italy to Russia, Japan and, of course, the Middle East. The many different locales give the game some character although more detail. particularly in the mostly sparse interior settings, would have been nice. It's much needed considering that 47 is a laconic and unengaging sort of bloke and the game lacks a bit of personality as a result. Enemies and

weapon models also look like they could have used a few additional polygons. Also, occasional glitches tend to rear their ugly heads during close quarter combat sequences.

Things are equally solid - rather than outstanding - in the sound department. Together with some excellent voice samples in the briefing sessions, cutscenes and during gameplay, Hitman 2 also features some quality weapon and sound effects. The musical score tends to stay mostly in the background, but unnoticeable is preferable to being annoying.

A substantial improvement over the original, Hitman 2 gives players plenty of freedom when it comes to tackling missions. The gameplay can't truly be described as open-ended considering that the stealth angle is pushed so heavily. Luckily, it does offer enough challenge and variety to make players think they are doing more than simply adding to a body count. Now, who's next on the list?

Derek Lee

PAY ATTENTION

Prior to each mission, players are given an excellent briefing session, which provides information on the background of each target, entry, rendezvous and exit points, and security levels. Accompanying the briefing text and voiceover are useful surveillance photos and video footage, as well as an excellent map screen. This helpfully details the positions of hostiles and proves invaluable during the game. The whole session smacks of quality: a true espionage movie-type briefing which gets players in the mood for the upcoming action.

RATING

FOR

Mission design Varied approach to **Rewarding stealth**based action

AGAINST

Short experience One-dimensional No multiplayer

OVERALL

The hitman is back with stealth and action in the same quality but

Rollercoaster Tycoon 2

Developer: Chris Sawyer ■ Publisher: Microprose ■ Distributor: Infogrames ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Three years later - but who'd know the difference?

SYSTEM

NEED

P2-600 128MB RAM 8MB Videocard 120MB HDD

WANT

P2-600 128MB RAM 8MB Videocard 120MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.rollercoastert ycoon2.com The official site featuring the usual extras and competitions. Also has many brightly coloured animated gifs. Consider yourself warned. compelling when it arrived in the second half of 1999, receiving a Gold Award for its distinctive style and fearless focus on one thing: building perfect rollercoasters. Around that time, we were playing Alpha Centauri, Unreal Tournament and Aliens vs Predator. So what's changed in the interim? We're still trying to shoot our mates the most times in a confined area, still playing strategy games of all natures and still upgrading our systems. But three years is a long time and the easiest way to tell is by the visuals.

AvP2 looks a hell of a lot better than its predecessor, the same for Unreal Tournament 2003. So why is it that Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 looks little better than the original? Why is it that Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 plays exactly like the original? The world has changed but apparently not for the Rollercoaster Tycoon people.

It's not that the Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 is *ugly*, mind you. The pixely little buildings and people are pretty in their own way and perfectly functional - they just look very five years ago. There are high resolution options (up to 1280x1024) for those with monitors like bay windows but no matter what your resolution the game is low detail. The tile-based, isometric squares of landscape and the flat blocks of colour are inescapable. This goes beyond style, there has been no effort to update the visuals to any great extent.

Gameplay still addictive

Efforts to write the game off prematurely are thwarted by the next three hours of play. The shockingly simple mechanic of creating an attraction and then having hundreds of randomised customers appraise it is as addictive as it was three years ago. Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 demands the old routine of checking



Mmn... jelly pythons

Test Results and then tearing down a section to try and build the ultimate ride. With an appraiser's eye, the intricacies of each style of rollercoaster must be examined: pull out the loop and put in an S-bend left to try to lower the neg Gs on your Corkscrew Coaster; keep the little ones short and sweet; avoid the turns on your bobsleds.

This is the central attraction of Rollercoaster Tycoon 2, the designing and construction of a ride, attempting to make it as exciting - and painless - as possible. Thankfully the game includes a sandpit mode that allows the construction of a rollercoaster outside of the game environment. The custom tracks can then be saved - scenery included - and imported into games in progress if funds allow.

Being all about rides, there's plenty of bonuses in this aspect of the game. Looking through the Track Designs

ROLLERCOASTER DEATHS

The one aspect of amusement parks not covered in Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 is the many and varied fatalities that occur each year at these establishments around the world. We're not just talking about the kids who fall out of electric trains. How about the link between high G-forces and the triggering of aneurysms? High rotation forces and bleeding on the brain? Alarming stuff indeed. Then there's a push for tougher regulations in the USA (the home of big cars, big women and big rollercoasters) where fatality statistics have mysteriously skyrocketed in recent years. We have people wetting themselves in The Sims - why can't people fall over from too much fun in this game?





My brain is melting, but the kids want to go on it over and over and over and over...

The the best new addition is the Giga Coaster, a behemoth reaching up to 300ft and capable of crippling your patrons.

wooden, mini, wild mouse, floorless, inverted and so on, as well as quieter rides: Ghost Train, Canoes, Jet Skis and so on, and sightseeing attractions: chairlifts and observation towers. There's a staggering range of material here including entirely new rollercoasters. The biggest and hence the best, is the Giga Coaster, a behemoth capable of heights 300 ft above ground and physical forces to cripple your patrons.

The core remains the same

But the core remains the same Additions to Rollercoaster Tycoon are all in this mould: rather than a major change to the formula, there is a slight adjustment, an inclusion that makes the game easier to use (auto-deleting trees), gives more variety (expanded choice of music tracks for rides) and more ways to play (more challenging scenarios). It might not be insider trading but there's corporate advertising here, with the Six Flags theme parks (sites in Belgium, Holland and Texas) appearing modelled in the game. Wonderful parks, they're a good addition to the game and give some good food for thought in designing your own. However, this tie-in with real world locations would have been more exciting if the game looked a little more like the

Go on, I dare you to shout "Avalanche!"



Wow, if we ever get sick of the ferris wheel, we can go in the MAZE!

A central aspect of the Rollercoaster Tycoon experience is customising your park with scenery to add excitement to your rides. As in the real world, money can make up for a lack of talent. A few sphinxes are sure to fool rollercoaster fans when the ride is dull. To accomplish this

hoodwinkery, there is a plethora of new themes including Factory (Giant Cogs), Spooky and Jungle. It's a pity these exciting new elements are all low detail.

The little people, after the rides, are the major concern. There's little evidence of any change in their behaviour or range of responses. They wander about, liking the last ride they were on, looking for a toilet, getting drowned when I don't like the look of them (yes, that still works). They have the same attributes: what they're carrying, money, thoughts, rides they've been on. It would've been nice if something new was added - lost children, pick pockets, hell anything. Staff members too, are doppelgangers to those in the first game. The same four options, same controls, everything.



This is a fine game that takes an exceptional format and updates it for a new generation. The game mechanic was awesome the first time around (that's why it scored 93%) and it remains highly entertaining. As a NEW product, it is something less. Did the dev team just lose their bottle and



The Intestines of God, that's what I'll call it!

decide to reheat the omelette of three years ago, rather than risk breaking any eggs? It's really hard to see what they've done apart from cursory

updating. How about something - say VISUALS - to push these monster PCs we've been slinging together all these years? How about that dream of riding your own rollercoaster? (Sorry Theme Park World, it's just not the same). That said, this game will run on a lowly PII-300 which is sure to

appeal to a considerable market. It's good, clean fun but a little too safe and thus will be relegated to kids game status. If there was evidence of a development budget, Rollercoaster Tycoon 2 might've taken us somewhere really special. Don't hold your breath for RCT 3.

John Dewhurst

IT LOOKS SO 1999

Management games have always been targeted at the hobbyists in the games population so graphics never needed to be their strength - remember Railroad Tycoon? The Sim games made concessions to the style and presentation despite being tile-based. Even the graphically stunning games are expected to employ a bit more depth these days - so why not the reverse? The question is: why didn't the sequel to a smash hit for Hasbro (now owned by Infogrames) receive sufficient funding to bring it up to the graphical standards of 2002? Cynical marketing on Infogrames behalf? Or a conscious decision to make the product suitable for the widest range of hardware?

RATING

FOR

Great value, hours of play

As good as the original

New rollercoasters!

AGAINST

Visually unimpressive Not much updating Too little for full price

OVERALL

Still a great game, but little more than an update to the original

79



Sudden Strike 2

Developer: Fireglow ■ Publisher: CDV ■ Distributor: Red Ant ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

A sequel? Or just a bunch of extra missions?



SYSTEM

NEED PII 333 64Mb RAM 350Mb HD ANY WINDOWS

WANT

PIII 600+ 128Mb RAM 8Mb videocard Patience

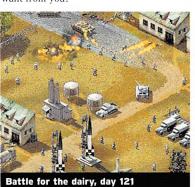
MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.suddenstrike2.com
The official site that features a decent number of downloads, and links to fan sites that are also worth checking out.

he original Sudden Strike has sold over 700 000 copies worldwide which is quite a reasonable figure and makes it one of the biggest selling independent European computer games o all time. Despite its popularity however, it has still managed to retain the image of a underground title due to the hardcore nature of its design. Combining the tension and attentiveness of Real Time Strategy with Commandoes 2 style detail and tactics on a grand scale the player is placed into the most scorching "hot seat" in town. Sudden Strike threw away the notion of 'gamey' tactics and made you think like a real commander, which begs the question, what does Sudden Strike 2 want from you?



It's a big 'un

A big commitment for a start would be the quickest answer. There are over fifty campaign missions alone here, and most of them will take multiple attempts, and a good amount of time, to complete. The scenario editor means that there will also be a good selection of missions available online from fansites, and the opportunity to share some of your own creations with the world at large. Sudden Strike 2 offers good value in terms of game time!

like a real commander

With resolutions up to 1024x768 the graphics are ordinary but acceptable, with all infantry type units easily recognizable without highlighting them. Any higher

resolutions would probably make handling your units a bit too fiddly without the art people rendering a second set of sprites. The armored units in SS2 are perfect copies of the originals; they can now also be captured and re-crewed which is a neat trick capable of turning the tide of a battle.

The artillery

Sudden Strike 2 threw away the notion

of 'gamey' tactics and made you think

Sudden Strike 2 boasts over 150 units in total including 50 never seen before. Some of the major units include Tigers, King Tigers, Sturmtigers, Panthers, Elefants, Stugs, T34s, SU85, IL2, Pershings and lots of other goodies. You have access to all kinds of artillery pieces

Arrr, I hate the sea and everything in it!



Jane Austen's Emma - the Director's Cut

Success is the correct unit at the correct time and the enemy not seeing you before you see him



Flying first class, VirginBlue style

RATING

FOR

Long gameplay Over 50 new units **More environment**

AGAINST

Not many changes Possibly too difficult Interface could have

Sudden Strike 2 offers good value in terms of game time

as well, ranging from anti-tank guns to Howitzers and rail mounted artillery. You can also get access to the armored trains in some missions. They pack a huge amount of firepower but are obviously limited in their range of movement.

As well as new armour there are new ways of dealing with it. You can no longer just blast away at the front of a tiger with infantry weapons and kill it;

TAKE TO THE HILLS!

Making use of available terrain and cover is a vital aspect of warfare and Sudden Strike 2. These infantry units were able to put themselves in a position to destroy this Tiger by ducking into the Pill Box after landing on the beach. They are now also protected from incoming artillery. As most missions require your forces to attack rather then defend it is important to use every advantage at your disposal.



you have to have a weapon capable of actually damaging the vehicle to do so. Therefore

maneuvering around to get side and rear shots is now part of the game.

It's all in the timing

As we mentioned previously one thing that hasn't changed is the game's interface. Whilst the wealth of units on offer is impressive it does provide one drawback, when commanding a hundred units or more finding the right man in the thick of battle can often take a long time, even though micromanagement of your troops is a very important part of the game.

Success almost always comes down to using the correct unit at the correct time and remembering not to let the enemy see you before you see him. In

Another inexplicable mushroom plague strikes Bowral

officers and scouts wisely and resisting the temptation to rush headlong into a fight. This goes against the grain of most seasoned RTS fans, which is what makes this series so great.

George Soropos



Stronghold Crusader

Developer: Firefly Studios ■ Publisher: Take2 ■ Distributor: Take2 ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

The only good Caliph is a dead Caliph





I'm the king of the castle, and you're the... ouch

he original Stronghold was a bit of a sleeper. While everyone was running around raving about other supposed hit titles due for release at the same time (like the ill-fated Battle Realms) Stronghold was quietly gathering fans and impressing those of us who needed games like Age of Empires, but wanted a bit more.

Crusader is the next step forward in the Stronghold story and while it isn't a radical reworking there are some tweaks and lots of new missions and units for you to fiddle with. So Stronghold fans will probably feel the game is worth the price of admission.

Increased options

Stronghold was a very engaging game, but it was also a little short on singleplayer options. Once you had belted the game in the admittedly satisfying campaign there weren't so many other options if you wanted a quick siege or series of missions.

Crusader makes up for this shortfall in a very big way. Apart from the four campaigns, which are loosely based on historical events, there is a fifty mission skirmish campaign which sees you facing off against a number of opponents in increasingly difficult situations. Firefly has even taken the wise step of giving you three 'skip' options in the campaign so you can progress three times ignoring a particular mission. This is a mighty good thing, as the long campaign gets harder

 $than\ Chinese\ arithmetic.$

There are some spiffing new units on offer too. The addition of Arabic troops really makes the game more diverse as the Sultan's boys are quite different to their European foes. For a start the Arabs are generally more mobile and less hardy.

There are devastating new hit and run units like mounted archers, which are brilliant as long as you can keep them away from a melee encounter with their nemesis, the European mounted knight.

New troops, new strategies

The Arabs make adept use of fire, with simple torch-bearing troops like the slaves being good value in that they are cheap and can set entire European villages alight very quickly. These fire based troops are a pyromaniac's dream and can wreak a lot of havoc, but you have to use them carefully

as you can easily set your own men on fire and kill them in huge numbers very quickly - funny but not very productive.

This camping holiday is NOT turning out like I'd hoped

Finally the Arabs have assassins, one of the most satisfying and sinister units in the game. These black-garbed villains can scale any castle wall and close quickly with defending archers introducing them to a scimitar very expediently indeed. Assassins are just perfect for occupying keep areas which they can strip of their covering missile troops and then open so that the rest of your assault force can enter.

Assassins are also extremely efficient at sneaking into large enemy encampments and, as their moniker implies, assassinating enemy leaders. You will need a few of them to do this as the leaders are tough foes, but because they are fleet of foot assassins can get around slow moving defending swordsmen and pikemen quite easily, killing off the enemy Lord and winning the game for you in a seductively sneaky fashion.

Functional graphics

Crusader's visuals are hardly bleeding edge, but there are now a few more frames of animation, with notable improvements including more animation of the torture devices and some different landscape types.

That said the Middle Eastern arid landscapes don't look as appealing as the more lush green fields in the original game. The predominantly desert landscape also makes Crusader more challenging as there are generally less places you can build farms so you had better use the

Now that's what I call a MAN!

THUS SPAKE THE CALIPH

The speech is for the most part pretty good, although we can't vouch for the authenticity of the Arabic your troops use when you are fighting as the Sultan or one of his mates. That said it is funny the way some of your troops, like the Arabic engineers, seem to have a spilt personality, making some comments in guttural Arabic and then using the finest English to affirm your orders - 'tally ho'?! The music is great though. There are a few of the rousing tunes from the original game as well as some new Arabic soundtracks.

SYSTEM

NEED

P2-350 64MB RAM 8MB Videocard 300MB HDD

WANT

P3-450 64MB RAM 16MB Videocard 300MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

strongholdcrusader.g odgames.com Official site with original Stronghold background and extras, also a forum for feedback on any technical and general issues. small tracts of arable land wisely.

The placement of more important resources like iron and stone can also lead to some mighty entertaining missions where you and your opponents struggle to control these scarce and essential mining encampments. Often fierce fights will ensue in locations where both sides need the same resources and end up squabbling for supremacy.

The interface in Crusader is not significantly changed when compared to the original game, but this is hardly an issue as the game was very slickly put together and the GUI delivered flexibility and instant control over the many base building economic and military operations you needed to keep abreast of in the game. The game could use a formation system though as you do have to micromanage your troops in battle more than you should without one.

Only half a sequel maybe?

Also Crusader feels a lot like a carbon copy of the original game, and despite the fact that there are more units and some great missions some of you might feel that you have been the victim of an unscrupulous camel trader who has sold you the same mangy beast twice.

But there are important differences: when used in concert two of the new buildings, the mercenary hut and the

DUMB AS A BOX OF CAMELS

The game does give you a decent challenge for the most part although as you play for longer you will become aware of the fact that Crusader is very reliant on scripted AI and that the game can be beaten if you can suss out what the AI is trying to achieve. Certainly the unit based AI is very weak and often it is quite possible to chip away at enemy troop formations by filling them full of arrows while they stand still seemingly oblivious of the fact that they are fast becoming human pin cushions. This is a serious chink in the game's armour and an issue which becomes apparent when you use more mobile forces like the Arabian mounted archers, which can skirt enemy formations slowly killing off enemies at will. Something to fix in the next patch perhaps?



Nice pants, can I burn your thatch?



Your horse ate my horseradish

market also make the game more combat focused. Instead of having to rely on the laborious process of gathering materials, then fashioning weapons and finally recruiting peasants you can just spend more gold and hire mercenaries who will come out of the desert to do your bidding.

This changes the balance of power somewhat as it is easier to amass quite large armies quickly as long as you have the surplus raw materials and sell them at the market. In multiplayer this makes for a bit of a play balance issue and it also accelerates the pace of the action making it more combat focused quite quickly. This is a double-edged scimitar as the delightfully detailed resource model is less important now than harvesting lots of resources and simply selling them to get a cheap standing army.

The bottom line though, is that the game is just worth it, because the new missions are plentiful and the difficulty level has been tweaked to make Crusader more fun than a harem full of bejewelled Arabian belly dancers at a young Caliph's 15th birthday.

Steve Polak



The new fire-based troops can wreak a lot of havoc but be careful or you'll incinerate your own men - which is amusing, but not very productive.



Morris Dancers! RUN!



RATING

FOR

Balanced strategy, tight economics Lots of play options. Interesting Chinese cultural elements.

AGAINST

More of the same Poor unit Al Can be frustrating

OVERALL

Even though there is much here you have seen before Crusader is still mighty engaging

82

Sims Unleashed

Developer: Maxis ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now







NEED

1.3GB HDD

WANT

P4-2GHz 512MB RAM 64MB Videocard 1.3GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

thesims.ea.com The official Sims site with all the expansion packs including unleashed. **Abundant with** downloads and chatrooms. If you're into that sort of thing



I'd like to buy a license for my pet fish, Eric

he Sims. These little folks with hedonistic lifestyles have only been around since 2000 but this simulation game of managing people and their houses has proved to be a winner. Whether you like it or not, five expansion packs later, Bob and Betty Sim are here to stay.

As in life, your pet's personality is random, thus you could end up with a slothful cat rather than the voracious hunter vou need to catch vermin



What the hell is wrong with this vending machine?

Actually, the virtual pet game concept is not new back in 1985 Activision released "Little Computer People" for Atari and Commodore computers, but it took Will Wright's vision of an

architectural game coupled with advances in technology to popularise it. And popular it is - the original Sims sold 6.3 million copies, which is a lot of Simoleons for Wright and Maxis. It's official: The Sims has sold more games than any other title, recently beating Myst to the number one slot.

Those salivating to play the The Sims Online, can in the meantime run wild with Unleashed. True to the spirit of an expansion pack Unleashed offers more 'stuff' for your Sims to furnish their homes with, five new careers to become wage slaves to, new NPC characters to interact with and new pests to generate those character building domestic dramas. Gardening gets a dig with self-sufficient Sims growing vegetables. There are 8 neighbourhoods comprised of 40 residential and community lots, and the Old Town community centres have been expanded to include not only a market for would-be farmer Sims but pet shops. That's right, Unleashed's main purpose is to give your Sims pets of their own.



Adopting a dog or cat involves selecting gender and breed then giving it a name. Dog breeds include german shepherds, spaniels, dalmatians, terriers and beagles and the cats include persians, siamese and moggies of every colour combination possible. The skills are obedience and tricks plus housebreaking for dogs and hunting for cats. The personalities are: quiet, friendly, playful, smart, loyal and do actually affect how your pet behaves. Obedience influences the trick and hunting skills as well as play behaviours such as fetch. Training is done by praising, scolding and rewarding with treats. Playing with your dog or cat raises sociability for your Sim. Smelly dogs also need to be washed and it's a delight to witness your Sim wash its pet.

Starting your menagerie

Acquiring a pet is simple. The in-house shopping function allows you to purchase tropical fish, parrot, or cockatoo. Or, if you're strapped for cash and have a soft heart, there are plenty of stray dogs and cats littering the Sim landscape, begging to be befriended. Once you start paying attention to the strays, they'll wander into your house. Put out a few food bowls and it's a certainty you'll create the eccentric old lady with dozens of cats, or your own Sim version of the Battersea Dogs Home.

There are more exotic pets available in the Old Town pet shops such as goldfish, turtles, iguanas, lovebirds, budgies, or if you don't want a stray you can buy your own dog or cat. Don't forget the accessories necessary for your pet's wellbeing: tanks and cages are for the fish, reptiles and birds. Dogs and cats require more: toys, treats, collars, bowls, bedding, a pet bathtub and grooming station, litterbox, a scratching post and even pet gyms are available. It's curious though that cats get collars but not dogs. As the name implies, dogs are never leashed in Unleashed.

Once you get Fluffy or Rover home, it will run around exploring the house and then probably piddle. This is where the fun begins. Dogs and cats are part of the family and have different personalities, skills to be raised and needs to be monitored. Like real life, your pet's personality is random, thus you could end up with a sleepy, slothful cat rather then the voracious hunter you need to catch vermin. Your dog could be a faithful companion but not so smart when it comes to learning tricks. To help, the pet trainer back at the store will raise the training skill for a fee, as well as offering advice on pet care. Pairs of dogs or



Snoopy dreams of turtles... WTF?

cats may also breed, and you'll have a puppy or kitten to care for which may be kept as another pet or sold to the pet store.

Pet antics

The graphics for each pet are well done in that typical Sims way (although all the dogs are strangely the same size) but it's their AI which makes them very entertaining. For example a cat will wash itself, curl up to sleep, and rub against furniture. Dogs will beg, roll over, chase their tails, cower when scolded and twitch in their sleep. Your dog and cat are aware of other animals: they'll make friends or foes with the neighbourhood strays, check out the birds (cats especially), the turtles and iguanas. Birds will be alarmed at the presence of a cat - a thought bubble with the image of a crossed out cat's head will appear above the bird and the parrot and cocky will 'tell' its owner that it doesn't like cats the next time a human talks to it. Dogs and cats will dream most usually about their 'needs' like food bowls and bedding, but for reasons only known to Maxis, they'll also dream of turtles!

Also fascinating to watch is the human Sims interaction with their pets. Types of playful interaction increase as the bond with the dog or cat grows, with the owner having a higher 'faction' then other members of the family. Sims can play, wrestle, hug their pets, get their dogs to fetch a ball, even get them to attack other Sims. As the relationship grows the Sim will voluntarily seek out the pet and the pet in return, especially the dog, will follow the Sim, even watching it's owner sleep. Sims can also play with their turtles, iguanas, budgies and lovebirds which raises fun, or can talk or dance with their cockies and parrots which raises charisma.

New old town

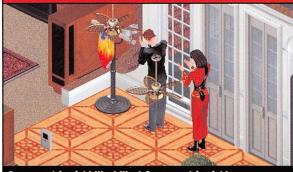
Sims Unleashed supports multiple neighbourhoods with previous families still accessible. Lots can also be rezoned as community or residential and built to your taste. The Old Town community centres are but a cab ride away for the entire family (including dog and cat) and here your family amuses itself by listening to musicians; having coffee and pastries in the cafes; buying or selling your home grown produce at the markets and restocking your supply of vegie seeds; socialising with neighbours and friends; browsing for decor items and



Just keep making a mess kitty, and we'll see how Mr Petrol & Lighter responds...

PET SEMETARY

It's well known that death in Simsville is a possibility rather then an eventuality, but yes pets can die. Maids will only clean tanks and cages so fish, birds and turtles can starve to death if not tended to. Neglecting the cat or dog will cause an animal services person to come rescue them, although to a hungry cat your fish or birds are fair game. However it's not enough for a busy Sim to just feed their turtles, fish, iguanas and birds and then ignore them. Your Sim must interact with them, otherwise they'll die from loneliness which will really upset the family although it's pretty funny to see the parrot and cockatoo literally fall off their perches.



Our parrot is sick! Woe! Woe! Our parrot is sick!

pet accessories not available via the home shopping channel; exercising your pet in the parks and having it judged. A successful show dog or cat wins trophies for its proud owner to display at home in a cabinet. When you leave the house, its state is suspended, although your Sims needs aren't, so if your



Dogs and cats will dream, usually about their needs like food and bedding, but for reasons only known to Maxis they'll also dream of turtles

Sims left the house in a pigsty, then they'll be too tired from the excitement of Old Town to clean it up when they return.

Conclusion

Unleashed needs only the original Sims to be installed. However, other expansions, the custom editor and free downloads from www.thesims.com will only enhance player creativity. While you can't take your pet with you on a Hot Date Downtown, you can certainly take your pet to Vacation Island. If you dismissed the Sims as being so similar to modern existence it's depressing, then Unleashed will breathe new life into the formula. The interaction is entertaining, from a Sim going oochycoochy over his pet iguana to rolling on the floor with his dog. Whether you want to make happy little Sims, or prefer to explore devious social engineering creating mini societies in a single player environment has never been more fun.

Ruth Lawrence

RATING

FOR

Interaction of pets and Sims Realistic animal behaviour Only \$50!

AGAINST

1.3GB for pets! Interface clumsy Low-end graphics

OVERALL

Another quality expansion from the game that seemingly can't be stopped!



Empire Earth: The Art of Conquest

Developer: Mad Doc Software ■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Distributor: Vivendi ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: M15+ Low ■ Available: Now

Not a bridge too far but an expansion too late?

SYSTEM

NEED PII 350 64Mb RAM

64Mb RAM 128Mb for XP 8Mb Video

WANT

PIII 600 265Mb RAM 450Mb HD 32Mb Video

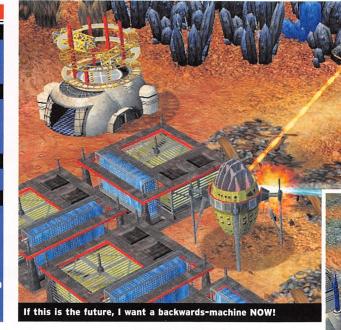
MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

empireearth.sierra.c

Conquest expansion, but apprantly we're in the digital age right now which is to be followed by the Nano age. Brutal!



e want to rule the world, hell who doesn't. Empire Earth gave gamers the chance to fulfill their wildest dreams of conquest and domination by spanning all the great epochs of human civilisation for the first time in RTS history. In one day alone you could spank the ancient Greeks (the main reason they wore skirts into battle) have your way with the odorous Frankish women (sometimes referred to as a Frankfurter, or when more than two people are involved, a hotdog) and even shoot the moustache off an Austrian cavalry officer.

What have we got here?

The Art of Conquest ads some significant new areas to the game, not least of which is an entirely new future epoch and twenty three new civilisation specific powers. The new Epoch introduced is of course the Space Age, and takes place after 2200AD. In this age China has apparently taken control of most of Asia, resulting in the creation of a new country called the United Federation of Asian Republics. As with any new Federation this one is keen to take over the world and space, and everything else it can get its' hands on.

The Space Age

The Space age provides many new units for the game: The Space dock is the link between these two new worlds; Space Turrets are your new defense structures, the Robot Farm is an automated food production centre, while the Anti-Missile Battery is your only defence against

nuclear attack. One of the best new units is the Spy Satellite as it provides an observation platform allowing you to see what your opponents are doing. The Orbital Space Station is a new Wonder which gives a morale boost to all your space units. The last new thing added is a calamity: the Meteor Storm. These burning rocks will inspire a great wailing and gnashing of teeth in any player that they are used upon, and therefore make a superb multiplayer weapon!

AND THE WINNER IS ...?

Empire Earth garnered quite a few

'Game of The Year' awards last year from many popular US games

magazines. Which just goes to show

you that people who make a living

from reviewing games don't always

know what the hell they're talking

see how the game achieved such a

status considering the predictable and basic nature of the game's

design and gameplay.

about! In hindsight it is still hard to

Call your lawyer

There are two new heroes also available in the game. The first one is Hu Kwan Do, a warrior hero. He was one of the founding fathers of the UFAR and apparently a brilliant businessman. He terrifies your opponents by threatening them with

aggressive mergers, legal injunctions and hostile takeover bids while the other new hero, Khan Sun Do, is the son of Hu Kwan Do and specialises in paternity suits, being arrested outside nightclubs and writing off expensive sports cars.

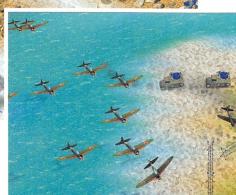
Art of Conquest boasts three new

campaigns, apparently by popular demand one of them concerns the Roman Empire and its quest for world domination. The next new campaign centers around the new Empire of Japan, in particular when the United States was dealt a humiliating blow at Pearl Harbor, and the dropping of the world's first atomic bomb. The last set of new missions is set in the Space Age and of the three has the most interesting scenarios.

Anyway...

We'd like to finish this review by saying something like 'this expansion makes the GOTY even better than every other game released so far' but sadly it isn't true. Empire Earth is a fun game, if you haven't been playing RTS's for the last six years. To be perfectly blunt however this expansion does little that is new and interesting, offers little challenge to the experienced gamer and does little more than help a tired and clapped out genre gasp out another few months of relevance.

George Soropos



Hmn... not an impromptu airshow, methinks

RATING

FOR New units

More civ powers
Fresh tactical

AGAINST

RTS fatigue No far zoom out Too few new ideas

OVERALL

More meat for EE fans to chew on. "Game of the Year" though? It's a mystery to us all.

76

Khan Sun Do is a new hero who specialises in paternity suits, being arrested outside nightclubs and writing off expensive sports cars

80 PCPP

Legion

Developer: Strategy First ■ Publisher: Paradox ■ Distributor: Thumpers Game Zone ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

Your love for this game will not be



egion is the perfect game. The perfect game for kids to sell to sceptical parents who think gaming is a waste of time and money. With this game in hand, the spiel becomes virtually automatic: "Look, Mum, this teaches me about the history of the Roman Empire, so games can't be all that bad!" From there it's only a short step to explaining that Battlefield 1942 and Medal of Honour are really just WWII historiography on disc.

SYSTEM

64MB RAM

300MB HDD

64MB RAM

300MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

www.paradoxplaza.c

Official publisher

on the game. Not

site. A lengthy blurb

much but there is a

picture of Conan the

Barbarian you can

have a look at.

ONLINE

16MB Videocard

8MB Videocard

NEED

WANT

In this turn-based strategy title, players can either choose to

play as the Romans, or one of the many "barbarian" tribes resisting subjugation. Regardless of choice, all sides play roughly the same. There are only four main scenarios, making the single player experience rather short-lived. Combine this with only a low to medium difficulty level and no multiplayer mode and Legion becomes the gaming equivalent of a light skirmish rather than a protracted campaign.

My pilum...

Apart from its subject matter, Legion is really no different from the countless Civilisation-wannabe titles, following the strategy game formula to the letter. Typically, players must manage the resources (food, lumber and ore) of a number of different cities under their control in order to construct support buildings and raise an army.

Strategy elements are brought into play when it becomes apparent that each city only has a limited amount of real estate in which to construct (and later upgrade) buildings necessary for resource generation or troop production. As empires expand, the task becomes more difficult. Players will need to keep production going to support armies in the field and forces garrisoned to protect border cities against invasion. Even so, the technology tree is quite basic and by no means difficult to manage. Add an overly simple interface, and diehard strategy nuts

Screens with red borders!

Having raised a suitable army, players will begin turning their minds to conquest. This can be achieved in one of two ways: diplomacy or war. Whilst bloodthirsty players may think that using a sword is always more preferable

ANCIENT HISTORY

run the risk of falling asleep.

Legion is about as historically accurate as Gladiator, which will give games playing history buffs reason to pause when considering whether to add it to their collection. The campaigns are very loosely based on the rise of the Roman Empire, circa 50BC, and are set in Britain, Gaul, and Italy. However, given that most players aren't really too concerned if a few historical liberties are taken (yeah, those Nazis really did have a Paranormal Division), that's not the main problem. Instead, that honou is reserved for the gameplay which actually is about as dull and dry as wading through a dusty archaic historical text... written in Latin

(namely fun) to using a stylus, the unfortunate truth in Legion's case is that both are equally dull.

...is harder than your Sternum

The diplomatic options are limited to declaring war, making peace, and offering tribute. Hardly the stuff to inspire hefty tactical deliberation. Meanwhile, the combat mode is entirely automated with players only given control of troop placement and formation on a chessboard-type grid. Once the opening barrage of arrows is fired, players are removed entirely from the neatly animated, but still remote, action. The bigger problem is that the variables which players can set rarely seem to affect the outcome. Instead, battles are usually determined by force of numbers and fixed morale levels for different units.

Legion features some aptly ancient graphics, which would not have been so noticeable had the gameplay taken up some of the slack. Sound bites are repetitive although the music in-game and in cutscenes is not entirely unpleasant.

Whilst we here at PCPP are by no means brilliant students of history (Excuse

me, as Cicero said in his Third Oratory, "Speak for yourself sunshine!" - Ed), we do know a thing or two about games.

With its overly simplistic strategy elements, limited challenge and shallow gameplay, Legion hardly looks all-conquering. Maybe Mum was right after all.

Derek Lee



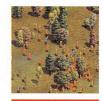
teaches me the

Roman Empire, so

games can't be all

history of the

that bad!"



RATING

FOR

Simple and clean interface Will suit strategy novices Battle animations

AGAINST

Generic gameplay Substandard graphics Lacking in depth

OVERALL

For strategy beginners or Roma-philes only.



Speed Challenge: Villeneuve's Racing Vision

Developer: Ubi Soft ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Probably not the future of F1 Racing

SYSTEM

OLOTEI

NEED 400MHz CPU 64MB RAM 32MB Videocard 650MB HDD

WANT

1Ghz+ CPU 128MB RAM GeForce3 650MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

rand Prix racing in the year 2047 is apparently a very different sport than what it is today. Regrettably, there are no garbage-fuelled, crystal-powered hover carsor at least there won't be if Jacque Villeneuve gets his way. Sunglasses company, Bolle, has somehow managed to monopolise the racing industry, Schumacher and Ferrari are no longer making every one else look silly, and Villeneuve himself is still blasting around the tracks, even though a little bit of mental arithmetic suggests that he would be eighty-something years old.

The way it's gonna be

Because the cars are so fast and dangerous in the future, they must be driven from remote virtual reality cockpits - at any rate, that's what the brief intro movie will have you believe. The first few laps in Speed Challenge reveal a moderately testing driving model that is sort of simulation, but mostly arcade. There are obvious obstacles in judging the exact extent of the game's realism, suffice to say that if a 2047 GP car

turned out to really be this easy to control, Jacque probably could still handle it at eighty. That's not to say the game doesn't present a challenge, but it's definitely not a hardcore sim.



The player is presented with an uninspired set of driving modes, including Quick Race, Championship and

Championship and Grand Prix modes (you also have the option to race online). Grand Prix Bolle. Shove 'em up your nosey

More realistic water effects than you can stomp a gumboot in!

is a one-off race with qualifying sessions and random weather included. The weather is either raining or it is not, but it can change mid-race (if 'changeable weather' is enabled). There are eleven different tracks, each named after their home city, except in the case of Australia, which is just called Australia (we must not have any cities in 2047).

The graphics and audio are both only mediocre. There are some very impressive visual effects, such as sun glare, motion blurring and rain splashing on the road, but the graphics are ultimately let down by low polygon 3D models that have been rendered with mundane textures. The game also features stereoscopic mode, which can be used in conjunction with special 3D glasses.

Is this really revolutionary?

While the concept of futuristic GP racing is intriguing, Ubi Soft has failed to make

Speed Challenge a truly distinctive or interesting title. It's far too similar to modern day Formula One racing to be truly eye-catching. Maybe if the cars were ultra, super quick (as it stands, they reach speeds only slightly faster than modern F1 cars), or were capable of hovering or something, it may have stood out a little more. They do feature an "autopilot" mode, but I have yet to figure out the use of letting the AI drive your car for a while.

Overall, Speed Challenge fails to be particularly engaging, although good force feedback effects and stereoscopic mode do make it stand out a little. It may appeal to Formula One buffs that are after something different (or extreme Jacque Villeneuve fans), and it is certainly an acceptable futuristic racer, but if you're in the market for a pure driving game, there's plenty of better things on offer.

Victor Webster

Setting up your car for the wet may

FUTURISTIC NUTS

involve more than simply whacking on a set of wet weather tires. The garage section, where all the car tweaking takes place, is impressively complete. The player has the option of tuning numerous things such as weight distribution, gearing, roll bars, ride height, and more. Indeed, the setup screen is very reminiscent of what one might expect from Papyrus' hardcore racing simulations. Fiddling around with various setup options in order to milk a little extra speed from your racer is one aspect of the game that tech-heads might find appealing.



Not to say that this game doesn't present a challenge, but it's definitely not a hardcore sim.

RATING

FOR

Good force-feedback Fast and smooth Stereoscopic mode

AGAINST

Uninspired Simple 3D models Bland textures

OVERALL

An alluring idea, but lacking uniqueness required for a futuristic racer

74

Good to see them putting that monument to good use at last

Links 2003

Developer: Microsoft Games ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$98.00 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

How loud are your trousers?

SYSTEM

NEED

PII 400 256MB RAM 16MB Video Card 390MB HDD

WANT

2Ghz+ P4 / AthlonXP 512MB RAM 32MB Video Card 1GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

uccessful game franchises come in many forms and a winner for Microsoft has been the Links series. The 2003 incarnation expands the franchise with higher resolution graphics and a new swing method that actually revitalises the genre, even for those of us that aren't of the golfing persuasion.

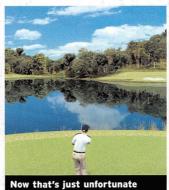
Courses

Links 2003 ships with six 6 different courses that you can play on. Six might sound like a rather small number but as each course features 18 holes, you're actually getting 108 different holes to play on. Offering a nice homey South Pacific flavour is Kauri Cliffs, an amazing New Zealand golf course on the cliffs of an island. Cabo del Sol takes you to Baja California; Gleneagles offers a lovely autumn feel in charming Scotland; Cambrian Ridge is set in the beautiful pine forests of Alabama: the Otsego club located in Northern Michigan offers a tranquil alpine environment and finally the Skeleton Coast is a fictional course off the coast of Africa.

Graphically the courses are quite well done but essentially the Links engine hasn't changed much between versions and is still as slow. Although at ground level all is 3D with topographical changes, the trees and foliage are just static sprites. This has the advantage of giving the scene a photorealistic feel but at the same time is so static that you often feel like you're playing inside a postcard. Other glaring

None of these golfers dare show their faces... obviously







If only the girls had talked to me at school!

omissions are birds, wildlife, moving clouds or even just some leaves blowing in the wind. Obviously these kinds of touches weren't on the developers mind because there are plenty of environmental sound effects such as rushing water and chirping birds but all without visual reinforcement.

Swing baby, swing

Fans of the Links series are probably becoming a little bored of the "classic" swing style which involves a bar that fills quickly and based on where the player twitches, er clicks connotes whether the shot will be weak or strong and either hook, go straight, or be sliced. This method has indeed become a little tired as it was first introduced in Leaderboard Golf way back in the days of 8-bit home computers.

Called the real-time swing, this new way of hitting the ball is actually quite fun and intuitive. Instead of clicking at the right time, the real-time swing involves using the mouse to simulate a golf swing. Easy to do but hard to master, you basically pull the mouse towards you to set the back swing and then roll the mouse forward to hit the ball. The neat thing is that the game examines how fast the mouse was moving and how straight a line you moved it in to determine how hard the

ball was hit and its trajectory. Although this swing methodology has been used in other games it's new to the Links series and has been implemented really well making for a much more challenging, entertaining experience. Once the ball is hit, the physics are excellent and react in a very "real-world" way with accurate bounce and roll. Trees aren't impassable barriers either but will slow your ball down if you hit through them.

Roll your own

Shipping with the Arnold Palmer Course Designer, Links allows those so inclined to make their own courses which they can then share online at Microsoft's Links country club web page. Fully backwards compatible with previous links versions there are many, many courses already available for download.

Online play is also well catered for and you can play socially with others across the Internet, LAN or as is the advantage of turn based games, can play by email. The Links VGA Tour has also returned and offers the winner the opportunity to win 1 million dollars by sinking a 60 foot putt. In the likely even that the winner fails they will at least walk away with \$50,000 US.

Jere Lawrence

Post Shot Selection Seet Datance In Art. Total Adds a stocks to the secone and ries, you drop the boll on your next turning to the secone and ries. Your ball is in a hazard! Your ball is in a hazard! Next Up. Jane Dance like a duck!

THE ORIGIN OF GOLF

It's quite well known that the 18-hole modern day game of Golf initially started in the Scottish town of St. Andrews but well before that numerous other cultures were entertaining themselves with similar games.

Paganica

The Romans in the third century B.C. played a game that involved hitting a ball made of leather and feathers with a bent stick similar to the ones used in early golf.

Literally meaning "hitting ball", way back in 943 A.D. the Chinese played a game that was very similar to Golf which involved hitting a ball into a series of pits and was apparently the favourite sport of the Emperor Huizong. One theory suggests that it was imported into Europe by tradesmen doing business in the Orient.

RATING

FOR

Photorealistic sprites Great new swing method

Multiple forms of online play

AGAINST

Static environment Commentary

Slow on the redraw

OVERALL

Great for hardcore golfers and with the real time swing, fun for gamers too.

79

Divine Divinity: Create your own destiny

Developer: Ubi Soft ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Germany's sleeper-hit RPG beckons us to "gaming heaven"

NEED PII 350 64Mb RAM 128Mb for XP 8Mb Video WANT PII 350

64Mb RAM 128Mb for XP 8Mb Video

MULTIPLAYER

No - bummer!



ith such an obvious tautology as Divine Divinity (DD) you could be excused for thinking that this game is just another poorly translated budget RPG title. The reality however is far different. This compelling game by CDV, the German company responsible for Sudden Strike and Cossacks is actually an incredible merging of hardcore questing and action RPG style combat.

Excuse me, where are the toilets?

The background story encompasses the usual kind of RPG fare in that you're "the chosen one", the divine saviour sent to put an end to all the strife in the troubled world of Rovellon. As always seems to be the case though, you start the game with amnesia after having been thrashed within inches of your life by generic bad-guy number one. A friendly and obviously other-worldly cat brings help in the form of a healer who nurses you back to health and thus your adventure begins.

Character customisation

Race and Class separation in DD is very interesting. At the beginning you must select your class - Survivor (thief), Warrior or Mage. These templates essentially only offer different character graphics and starting stats. With each and every level you earn in DD it's possible to raise skills from either the survivor, warrior or mage skill trees. This allows for some of the most interesting hybrid characters of any RPG; it's possible to make a survivor that can summon pets, a mage with weapon specialisations, or a warrior that can cast spells and heal himself.

This game is going to pick up a strong following very quickly and is only let down by its lack of multiplayer support

REALISTIC ECONOMY

Shop-owners only carry a certain amount of gold on them so selling loot involves an element of strategy. Some items will be so expensive that the shopkeeper simply can't afford it and in these situations you can either barter one expensive item for another, or barter one large item for a number of smaller supplies. It might seem like a clumsy system but actually it offered a fascinating strategic interface around selling.

More clickables!

The level of detail and object manipulation in DD is astounding. Candles and torches can be lit and unlit, chairs, boxes, plates, mugs and a myriad of other items can be moved and manipulated in numerous ways. Different skills also involve interacting with the environment - learn alchemy and you can make potions from growing plants. As in the Ultimas almost everything can be picked up and through clever object oriented programming there is a massive amount of item interactivity.

200 hours of gameplay

In DD there are two types of quests: the main quest which leads to the end of the game and numerous sub-quests to keep hardcore RPGers happy. CDV have gone on

record as saying that they wanted DD to customise itself as much as possible to different gamers and they have certainly succeeded. Hack

and Slashers will be drawn in by the fast paced, potion swilling combat and hardcore RPG types will have plenty of sub quests and conversations to indulge in. The main quest is reported as

taking 40 hours to complete and the sub quests offer another 160 hours of play.

Graphically DD is extremely competitive with every other RPG offering. Using the familiar isometric view that's found in Diablo II / Icewind Dale, DD is visually very impressive. There's even Direct3D support for light sources and overall performance enhancements. A nice visual element that hasn't been seen before is that water reflects the environment around it as well as the player character and NPCs.

Conclusion

RPG fans have a lot to be excited about in DD. It offers extremely flexible character progression, an easy to use and fast paced combat system, hundreds of quests, numerous mobs to kill, dungeons to explore and attention to detail that we haven't seen in an RPG since the Ultimas. This game is going to pick up a strong following very quickly and is only let down by its lack of multiplayer support.

Jere Lawrence

I shall turn your chiton to mush!

RATING

FOR

Entertaining combat Loads of quests Travelling interface

AGAINST

No multiplayer User interface bugs Recall too often

OVERALL

An RPG with a fantastic combat engine. Potential cult classic.

87

Total Club Manager 2003

Developer: EA Sports ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Do you love soccer and suffer from an authority complex?

aking a seemingly super successful, multi-million dollar soccer club, and steadily sending it into a spiral of desperate bankruptcy while shattering the confidence of every one of its star players is much easier than you might think. That's the first thing the novice player will learn about Total Club Manager 2003. But given a little persistence and patience, the game becomes extremely addictive and very satisfying to play.

A bit of friendly competition

TCM2003 builds on the moderately successful, FA Premier League Manager 2002 adding extensive new options, improved 3D match graphics and a much slicker user interface. EA's chief rival in this field, the Championship Manager series, is widely accepted as the best management sim, although TCM2003 is bound to give its less flashy other rivals a good run for their money. The game has obviously been heavily influenced by its chief competitor, as the similarity between the two, in terms of style of play and depth of options, is now more

noticeable than ever.

The number of teams available is massive, featuring multiple divisions from all the major European soccer playing nations. There are no non-European teams available, although actual players from any country can still be used (providing you can secure them a work permit and convince them to leave their homeland!).



SYSTEM

NEED

64MB RAM 8MB Videocard 450MB HDD

WANT

256MB RAM 32MB Videocard 450MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Extreme micro-management

The depth of game-play is overwhelming, so much so that there's simply not enough room on this page to even scratch the surface. Suffice to say that if it happens in real soccer management, chances are it's simulated in the game. You even decide how you (the manager) act on the sideline

during play! Jumping around and

may give your fans and players the impression that you just don't care. As a team manager, you are often interviewed by the media, and whatever you say is likely to somehow affect your players and fans, let alone your personal reputation. But personal reputation maybe the least of your worries, as you are accountable for

while sitting on the bench looking docile

everything to do with the club, including staff and player contracts, sponsorship deals, game tactics, training and youth player regimes, stadium facilities, merchandise, advertising - the list goes on and on. Of course, the option is available to hire other staff members that release much of the burden from your shoulders, but even with a team of assistant managers, coaches and marketing directors, this game will only succeed in frustrating those that are just not interested in the genre to begin with.

Sailing just wide of the post

TCM2003 had the potential to be vastly superior to Championship Manager, unfortunately it's somewhat spoiled by seemingly random crashes and trivial, but annoying bugs. By using the "autosave weekly" option, the otherwise gamedestroying crashes can be reduced to a mere inconvenience, but even if zealous fans don't mind the occasional restart and can ignore the minor bugs, this lack of

polish has adversely affected what would otherwise be an outstanding score. **Victor Webster**

RATING

Addictive - hours of gameplay **Elaborate matches**

and teams **3D Matches**

AGAINST

No non-Euro teams **Frustrating**

OVERALL

If it weren't for inexcusable bugs, this could be the best management sim vet







3D GRAPHICS VS SIMPLE TEXT

TCM2003 is the only management sim that offers 3D matches, although they're hardly a necessity. Indeed, most matches will probably be played in the quicker and much more functional "text mode". You get much more control when the games are played in text mode, as you are allowed options - such as chatting to players at half time, and acting-out on the sideline - that are not available in the 3D match. The fact these things are available in text mode, but not in 3D, is quite disappointing, because the 3D matches (and commentary) are otherwise implemented outstandingly well.

In Pole Position



F1 FORCE FEEDBACK for PC



SCUDERIA ANALOG GAMEPAD for PlayStation®2



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Harvey Norman

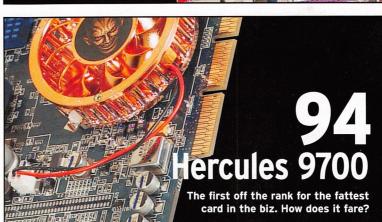
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*for PlayStation®, PSone'm, PlayStation®2

IN REVIEW ASHER AND JERE AND \$250,000 WORTH OF SWEET, SWEET KIT

Believe it or not, she's also real time. Find out how...







fascinated with what we discovered. The gap between Intel and AMD is expanding at a considerable rate and even though AMD are still way ahead in regard to price, the reality is that Intel has overcome numerous technological milestones that AMD have yet to surpass. For more on this exciting tech story make sure you read the highly informative piece from Asher Moses. The other part of our tech feature, a look at the new

or those that simply must have the absolute latest in technology it would well be worth taking a look at this month's tech feature

concerning DDR400 memory and the new KT400 boards that are currently making the rounds in the market. This may be a shock to

offers any benefit to the end user. Egad </sarcasm>.

some of you but it seems that a certain sector of the hardware industry

This time it's the KT400 series of boards that have come under the microscope in the PCPP labs and after a lot of research we were

is happy to incorporate technology irrespective of whether it actually

DDR400

The fastest DDR RAM yet But if you run Athlon, is there any point in getting it? Asher investigates.

characteristics of DirectX 9.1 just so happens to contain a number of juicy leaked images and a feature list that offers a "first-look" at the power of the NV30 (GeForce 5). The images are just incredible and with appropriate developer support image quality in games is truly reaching broadcast level.

Expanding upon our tech feature on DDR400 memory, we take a look at a number of new KT400 boards and set them against each other. I shan't spoil anything but let's just say the results are "surprising".

It's official, overclocking is no longer only a skill for the tech-savvy because corporations are getting in on the act. The Abit Ti4200 O.T.E.S. card is the first official "overclocked" card. Although essentially a G4 Ti4200, Abit have added a massive fan and liquid filled heat-pipe that allows the card to reach Ti 4600 speeds only considerably cheaper. Consumer level overclocking - not bad. We also take a look at an AGP 8x G4 MX440, check out Videologic's ZXR-500 speakers along with a series of Microsoft inputs.

One of the more exciting pieces of equipment to arrive this month would have to be the brand new Logitech MX700 cordless mouse. Yes, the time has finally come that a cordless product can offer the same kind of performance as a cabled product. After years of waiting, gamers can "cut the cord" so to speak and never need worry about resistance or tangles again.

Finally I would just like to wish all the readers and contributors of this fine magazine a very Merry Christmas/Hanukkah and may the year to come wow us even more with a myriad of breathtaking technology. But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight, "HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A GOOD-NIGHT!"

Jere Lawrence **Deputy Editor** jerel@next.com.au



Hace The truth about DDR400 memory and AMD architecture

During the extensive coverage of KT400-based motherboards here at PC PowerPlay, one problem has remained constant - the lack of a performance increase when jumping from DDR333 to DDR400 memory. After further investigation, the source of the problem has become apparent and is actually quite concerning, especially considering the pace at which technology is currently moving. Asher Moses dons his detective outfit and uncovers the real truth.

It is important that you are aware of exactly how the CPU and memory interact inside a PC. The FSB (Front Side Bus), also known as the System Bus, connects the CPU with the main memory as well as the other components w thin the computer. The speed at which your main memory can send and receive data to and from the CPU is usually measured in Gb/sec, and vice-versa. If the CPU can't receive data for processing as fast as the memory bus can send it, then any extra memory bandwidth available is simply unused.

The Problem

This is precisely the issue with current generation AMD processors. The 2 x multiplied 166 MHz FSB can only send/receive data at 2.7GB/sec, whereas the DDR400 memory supported by the latest chipsets (such as the KT400) can send/receive data at 3.2GB/sec. Due to the fact that the FSB can't receive data at anymore than 2.7GB/sec, the extra memory bandwidth provided by DDR400 is virtually useless.

On the other hand, the Intel Pentium 4's FSB features a maximum transfer rate of
4.2Gb/sec, which is precisely the
reason why we have seen such
significant performance increases when moving our Pentium 4-based systems to faster memory as opposed to our AthlonXP systems.

The Test

To verify our findings, we benchmarked a 533MHz FSB Pentium 4 against a 266MHz FSB AthlonXP system running both DDR400 and DI R333 memory. Both systems were identical in their specifications, and only differed in the type of processor and n otherboard used. Throughout testing memory timings remained at CAS2 to ensure accurate results. Test bed specifications were as follows:

- → AMD Athlon XP 2200+ and Intel Pentium 4 2.4GHz
- → Abit AT7-N AX2 (KT400) and Abit SR7-8X mother board (SiS648)
 → Cosair XMS3200 DDR400 memory

- → Abit Ti4200 OTES video card → Seagate 40GB 7200RPM HDD

As you can see from the results, the performance increase when jumping from DDR333 to DDR400 on the KT400 chipset is marginal, and certainly not noticeable in any real-world applications. On the other hand, when moving from DDR333 to DDR400 on our Pentium 4 system there were much greater performance gains.

The Response

We approached AMD, VIA, Intel, nVidia and various memory manufacturers for an official response regarding this issue AMD, Intel, VIA and nVidia replied almost instantly, however, we did no receive even an email from ary of the memory manufacturers contacted.

Quake	3 Ar	ena - 1	024x7	68 32-	bit			
Pentiu	m 4 2.4	GHz (DD	R333)		239.4	1		
Pentiu	m 4 2.4	GHz (DD	R400)		24	45.9		
Athlon	XP 220	0+ (DDR	333)	208	3.9			
Athlon	XP 220	0+ (DDR	400)	2	10.3			
0000	40	80	120	160	200	240	280	320

From the responses we did get, it seems as if the blame is simply being passed around. Says a customer Support Analyst at AMD: "This question is probably better suited for Via, the makers of the new chipsets that support DDR memory faster than PC2100". They then went on to say "Some people may think it's not worth the money to get a small improvement in

nVidia nforce 2: A Solution?

The nforce 2 motherboard by nVidia will be particularly exciting because it will be the first consumer level desktop board to feature DualDDR technology. Initially available for AMD chips only, essentially, DualDDR works when two sticks of DDR memory are used on the board allowing for a type of interleaved (SLI Voodoo users remember) memory access. Whilst one DIMM is in a wait state, the other is ready to read or write data.

ready to read or write data.

Brian Del Rizzo, PR manager
at nVidia explains further.

"More than just a single
"128-bit" memory controller,
DualDDR consists of two
independent, complementary,
and intelligent memory
controllers. Both memory
controllers operate concurrently
to each other to "hide" latencies
associated with typical
"chipsets". For example,
controller "A" reads or writes to
main memory while controller
"B" prepares for the next
access, and vice versa. The
complementary nature of the
two memory controllers cuts the
effective latency in half.

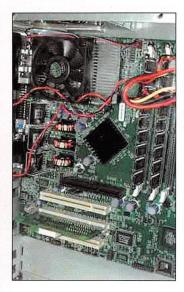
With regards to DDR, you have to understand that it has inherent inefficiencies; the need to open and close pages. For example, if you have a memory page open and need to access another page, even in the same bank, it's necessary to close the first memory page and open another which produces dead time.

For example, even just using the keyboard to send a small amount of data will need to open and close memory pages 4 times. performance. Other's like to be on the cutting edge and have the latest technology." This seems a strange statement as who would go out and purchase a ~\$300 motherboard with expensive DDR400 memory just to be on the cutting edge, knowing that there are no performance gains?

Even so, we took AMD's advice and made contact with VIA. Speaking with John Gatt, VIA's Web Media Liaison & Tech support Manager in Australia, after a period of no response he had this to say about the KT400. "Yes it is the next-gen chipset". He then went on to give us a few reasons why the KT400 is a worthy upgrade to the KT333 chipset. "It supports 8x AGP 2x v-link and has a new memory controller - it's an upgrade to the specs on the KT333."

Sure, the chipset supports AGP 8x and other new features, however, do these have any effect on performance? As you have seen from our benchmarks, no.

While your AGP card and I/O devices do utilise memory bandwidth, the benchmarks don't lie. The amount of bandwidth eaten up by these devices is currently too small to be of concern. Furthermore, with most modern graphics cards coming packed full of onboard memory, the trip to main memory is rarely required, rendering the extra bandwidth virtually useless. That said, if implemented correctly, extra memory bandwidth can come in very handy in terms of latency. See the boxout titled "nVidia: A Solution?" for more information.





The Future

While the problem is not as apparent today, with higher bandwidth memory technologies on the horizon, unless AMD decide to increase the Athlon's FSB yet again or release their Hammer processor featuring on-chip memory early, they could find themselves in some very hot water down the track. With QDR (Quad-band DRAM) and DDRII being the two main memory technologies of the future, how is the extra memory bandwidth they provide going to be taken advantage of by AMD processors? Food for thought.

Who to blame?

So whose fault is it? Is it AMD's fault for not producing higher bandwidth processors? Is it VIA's fault for releasing the chipsets, knowing full well that the performance increase is negligible? Or is it even the fault of the memory manufacturers? No one really, it's just the realities of competing technology. Intel is simply one step ahead of AMD with regards to maximum bandwidth at this point in time.

Asher Moses

The Horse's Mouth

To gain further clarification regarding AMD's supprt for DDR400, we got in contact with Graham Tucker, Senior Engineer at Intel.

PCPP: We are currently investigating DDR400 memory and its potential limitations. As we understand it, AMD processors aren't currently capable of using DDR400 memory to its fullest because the FSB can only receive data at 2.7 Gb/sec despite the memory having a max peak bandwidth of 3.2 Gb/sec.

GT: Correct. The very point you're making is why Intel were pushing RDRam many years ago. PCPP: So in this sense then we would be accurate in saying that Intel has a considerable advantage over AMD chips. GT: Absolutely.

We also contacted Brian Del Rizzo, PR manager at nVidia to further confirm our findings. While Brian added that other devices such as your hard disk, USB controller, AGP devices and even the keyboard are demanding memory bandwidth as well as the CPU, he did strongly agree with us on our main point. "If the FSB has a lower peak bandwidth than the memory subsystem, it will definitely be bottlenecked in that situation".



CPU		W. C. C. T. C.						
Pentiur	n 4 2.40	GHz (DDR	(333)				5883	
Pentiur	n 4 2.40	GHz (DDR	400)				5890	
Athlon2	(P 2200)+ (DDR3	33)		46	62		
Athlon	(P 2200)+ (DDR4	00)		46	669		
0000	750	1500	2250	3000	3750	4500	5250	6000
Memory								
Pentiur	n 4 2.40	GHz (DDF	(333)				5853	
Pentiur	n 4 2.40	GHz (DDF	(400)				5980	
Athlon	KP 2200)+ (DDR3	33)		463	31		
Athlon	(P 2200)+ (DDR4	00)		464	45		
0000	750	1500	2250	3000	3700	4500	5250	6000
HDD								
Pentiur	n 4 2.40	GHz (DDR	(333)			71	3	
Pentiur	n 4 2.40	GHz (DDR	(400)			7	19	
Athlon	(P 2200)+ (DDR3	33)			710		
Athlon	(P 2200)+ (DDR4	00)			71	2	







t must be incredibly frustrating to be a hardware developer in this current era of technology, particularly if you're a 3D card developer. Here at PCPP, we've only just recently covered the new ATi Radeon 9700 which not only impressed us greatly but with its DirectX 9.0 support, assured us that as soon as Microsoft's latest API is launched, there would be hardware to support it.

Unfortunately for ATI, and for Matrox with their Parhelia range, the technological advantage these DirectX 9 cards offered has been made redundant within only weeks of the launch of the R9700. Ironically, DirectX 9 hasn't even

been released yet and there are already hardware casualties.

It's in the Pixel Shader

The main aspect of DirectX that has caused the most headaches to hardware vendors has been in the realm of the pixel shader. This war started between nVidia and ATi way back with the release of the GeForce 3. Initially it was nVidia who had the advantage, the GeForce 3 was compatible with Pixel Shader 1.1 functions of Direct X 8.1 while the Radeon 7200 only supported pixel shading 1.0 making it DirectX 8.0 compatible only. ATi were quick to respond and within months had released the Radeon 8500 to a

Into the future with DirectX

Potentially an indicator as to how fast computer graphics are moving is that recently Microsoft announced that DirectX 9.0 has already been superseded by DirectX 9.1, despite the fact that a number of DirectX 9.0 compatible cards have already been released. But it's only a .1 change right, nothing to be concerned about?

DirectX 8.1 hungry public.

Fast Forward to 2002 and the same three protagonists nVidia, ATi and Microsoft are at it again. Besides a number of new features that DirectX 9 will bring (see box-out), the primary focus of development has been in the area of Pixel Shading. As was reported in our PCPP#78 tech feature, the Pixel shader is a part of the Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) that handles per pixel operations such as bump

mapping and other advanced effects. This is quite interesting because it is really transporting PCs and their graphics into the realms of parallel processing. That's to say, while the main CPU is executing code, the GPU can simultaneously and independently be executing its own instructions. In particular, the latest rumours we've heard about the NV30/35 GPU is that it will feature two new extremely





It is important to remember that all information relating to the NV30/35 is rumour only and is entirely unconfirmed by nVidia who declined to comment on every question that we asked them. Still, the GeForce 5 represents a DX9.0 video card that many are eagerly awaiting and the NV35 is said to be completely DX9.1 compatible.

N



powerful operations: loops and If Conditional tests.

The Pixel Shader however happens to be where the majority of development is occurring, both in DirectX and in the labs of video card companies. An example of the pixel shader's power is actually the Xbox. Due to its standardised programmable video hardware it has received custom development for its pixel shader since release and those that have been privy to the amazing effects in games such as Rallisport Challenge or Halo will understand the power of this hardware.

Indeed, in DirectX 9.1, this is where the primary change has occurred. While DirectX 9.0 offers

DirectX 9.1 features:

- → High-level shader language → Full library that supports patch meshes and traditional polygonal
- → Improved real-time animation capabilities that allow separate animations on the same mesh to be blended
- → Hardware Displacement Mapping
- → 64 bit floating point colour
- → Enhanced low-level graphics programmability with new programmable vertex and pixel shader 3.0 models in Direct3D AP
- → Full integration, including debugging, of new programmable shader models within Visual Studio
- shader models within Visual Studio

 → Enhanced DirectShow video
 rendering hardware acceleration
- → A new version of DirectMusic(r) Producer, enabling support for DirectMusic enhancements such as low-latency playback
- → New wizards for creating Direct)
 Media Objects (DMOs) for audio
 effects and DirectMusic tools for
 MIDL processing
- → Improved DirectPlay performance for multiplayer gan
- performance for multiplayer game

 → Availability of DirectPlay for
 Pocket PC 2002

support for Pixel Shader 2.0, DirectX 9.1 will feature even more functionality by introducing Pixel Shader 3.0. Even though it could be argued that Matrox and ATi shouldn't have been so quick to support an API that isn't even officially released they still have my sympathy because it was nice to know that there was hardware support for the latest API. Certainly this is a first in the industry where an item of hardware is obsolete before the software it supports is even publicly available.

DirectX 9.1 Brief

Since the arrival of 3D accelerators, DirectX has progressed beyond the expectations of gamers and even developers. As discussed earlier, PCs are quickly becoming parallel processing devices and it's DirectX that allows programmers to efficiently work with video cards that have progressively become more and more complex.

Says Ted Hase, director of Windows third-Party Gaming and Entertainment at Microsoft, "DirectX 9.0 offers unparalleled advances in graphics technology, Microsoft always has been a pioneer in the development of bestof-breed technologies and tools that facilitate the development of great gaming content. Developers will discover that the new capabilities built into DirectX 9/9.1 make it significantly easier to create content that demonstrates richness, robustness and totally immersive depth." Of course we won't see any of these effects until compatible hardware is available and developers start producing for it. Considering how long it's been before we saw DirectX 8.1 hardware fully utilised it may be some time before we see the fruits of all the DX9 labour.

Still, it's nice to know what graphical goodies to expect and a new function that simplifies development in DirectX is the new High Level

NV30 and NV35	GeForce 4	NV30 (Omen)	NV35
GPU	350Mhz	400Mhz	500Mhz
STRUCTURE	256bit	512bit	512bit
MICRON	0.15	0.13	0.13
MEMORY/SIZE	64-128	128-256	128-256
MEMORY/Mhz	650 DDR	800-1000 DDR/QDR	1000-1200 DDR/QDR
COLOUR	32bit	64bit FP	64bit FP
AGP	4x	8x	8x
RAMDAC	350Mhz	400Mhz	400Mhz
LMA*	2	3	3
TT&L	N	N	Y
DIRECTX/OPENGL	8.1/1.3	9.0/1.3	9.1/2.0
PIXEL SHADER RENDER	1.4(DX8.1)	2.0(DX9)	3.0 (DX9.1/Open G1 2.0)
PIPELINES	8	8	8
PCI-X**	N	Υ	Υ
TT&L***	N	Υ	Υ
NVBLUR****	N	Υ	Υ
DUE	Already	Feb 2003	April 2003

- * Lightning memory architecture, an nVidia term to connote more efficient memory accesses.
- ** PCI-X is the latest PCI specification to address the need for speed required in PCI devices. PCI-X operates at 133Mhz 1.0Gb/sec.
- *** TT&L stands for True Time and Lighting and is an external T&L until implemented in a companion chip that can process independently of the main GPU.
- **** When nVidia purchased 3Dfx they received the rights to all of 3Dfx's intellectual property, including Glide. NVBlur is nVidia's re-release of Glide that will be fully backward compatible with old Glide games as well as, we assume, new ones.

 Extra information: The NV30/35 can also render 4 Textures/Pixel in a single clock cycle and using "loop back" can apply an additional 4 textures per rendering pass. The NV30/35 will also feature a built in re-programmable DVD and TV decoder chip.



Shader Language (HLSL). One reason why there's a slump in DirectX 8.1 games is because developers need to communicate with the GPU in assembler in order to produce certain effects. DX9 HLSL has therefore been developed to allow coders to communicate with the hardware at a more familiar higher level language using C-like instructions.

In reference to the list of the DirectX 9 features, this is an unconfirmed list and as with all things beta, may be subject to

change before release.

By now you've most likely noticed the screenshots littered around these pages. One is a simple DirectX 9.0 render (DX9.0 Bear) while the rest are examples of the power of the NV30, a future DX9 compatible card by nVidia. It is simply staggering to consider the technological advances that are being made in graphics and with the release of DirectX 9 we, as gamers, are about to have our visual cortex well and truly overwhelmed.

Jere Lawrence

VIA KT400 Shootout



SiSoft Sandra Memory Benchmark	
RAM Integer	
Abit AT7-MAX2	1970
MSI KT4 Ultra	1965
Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra	1972
RAM Floating Point	
Abit AT7-MAX2	1898
MSI KT4 Ultra	1907
Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra	1893
0000 250 500 750 1000 1250	0 1500 1750 200

IA's KT400 chipset was met with mixed emotions from PCPP staff. On the one hand it offers high performance and plenty of new features, however, on the other hand it does not provide any performance gains over its predecessor, the KT333 chipset, due to the fact that the FSB of the AMD Athlon processors cannot make use of the extra memory bandwidth provided by DDR400 memory (as discussed in this month's tech feature).

Before we discuss the boards themselves, let's takes a look at some of the features that the KT400 chipset brings to the table. Firstly, as most current and future graphics cards will be based around AGP 8X, it is unsurprising that the chipset includes AGP 8X support with a maximum transfer rate of 2.1GB/sec. Also, those who plan on upgrading to the newer AMD Athlon processors featuring a FSB speed of 166MHz will be pleased to hear that the chipset also supports this faster FSB natively.

One of the most significant new features VIA is boasting with the KT400 chipset is DDR400 memory support. However, this support is currently "unofficial" as, at the time of writing this review, there is no JEDEC standard for the PC3200 memory specification. That said, whether the support is official or unofficial doesn't really matter to us, as long as there is an

option to run your memory at 400MHz in the BIOS.

Aside from the above mentioned features, there really isn't much new to the KT400 chipset that we haven't seen on the KT333 chipset. Due to the fact that all three boards are based on the same chipset and thus, will most likely perform identically, there are a number of other aspects we can look at to differentiate the boards and determine a winner. These include: package contents, feature-set and price.

Package Contents

As far as bundled software goes, the Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra is clearly superior. The board comes packaged with a "Symantec 8-in-1 Super Bonus Pack", featuring Norton Anti-Virus 2002, Norton **Abit AT7-MAX2**

Final Comment: An excellent motherboard but a more elaborate software bundle would have been nice.

Price: \$445.50 Distributor : Tech Buy URL : www.techbuy.com.au Phone : (02) 9648 1818

Ghost, Adobe Active Share, VCom Autosave (used for backing up data), WinDVD, Adobe Acrobat eBook Reader, Adobe Acrobat Reader and Imagemore. Abit and MSI obviously felt that software bundle was not the most important selling point of their product, as Abit only included Norton Anti-Virus 2002 and Adobe Acrobat reader, while the MSI board did not come packaged with any software CD at all.

Abit and MSI did however package some extra features with their boards that the Soyo bundle lacked. Firstly, the AT7-MAX2 is the first board to feature Abit's

new "Serillel" technology - a cross between Serial ATA and Parallel ATA. This comes in the form of a converter that allows you to run regular Parallel ATA devices through the Serial ATA ports on your motherboard. MSI on the other hand has bundled three backplate brackets with their board - one featuring two firewire ports, another with two USB 2.0 ports and finally, one providing a number of extra audio ports (including SPDIF) supported by the onboard 5.1 controller. Like we've seen on previous Soyo boards we've tested in the past, the KT400 Dragon Ultra comes



CPU								
Abit AT	7-MAX2						4669	
MSI KT	4 Ultra						4668	
Soyo K	T400 Di	ragon Ult	ra				4669	
0000	625	1250	1875	2500	3125	3750	4375	5000
Memory								
Abit AT	7-MAX2					40	545	
MSI KT	4 Ultra					4	4649	
Soyo K	T400 D	ragon Ult	ra				4650	
0000	625	1250	1875	2500	3125	3750	4375	5000
HDD								
Abit AT	7-MAX2	2				71	2	
MSI KT	4 Ultra					71	1	
Soyo K	T400 D	ragon Ult	ra			71	2	
	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800

Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra
Final Comment: An impressive software bundle, but when compared to the other boards it is a slight let-down.

Price: \$389.00 Distributor: TBA URL: www.soyo.com.au Phone: TBA

3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32-bit Abit AT7-MAX2 11888 MSI KT4 Ultra 11899 Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra 11879 7500 9000 10500 12000 3000 4500 6000

Busine	ss Wir	nston	e 2001	l				
Abit AT7	-MAX2			76.70413			60.5	
MSI KT4	Ultra					YEAR S	60.5	
Soyo KT	400 Dra	igon Ul	tra		400		60.4	
0000	08	16	24	32	40	48	56	64



Abit AT7-N	MAX2			33.6	
MSI KT4 L	Jitra			33.8	
Soyo KT40	00 Dragon U	ltra	28	33.2	

bundled with a USB panel that slots into a 3 1/2" or 5 1/4" bay and provides two USB 2.0 ports, a Smart Media card reader and a Compact Flash card reader.

Features

The Abit-AT7 MAX2 continues Abit's "MAX" initiative, lacking legacy devices as serial and parallel ports, yet including two firewire ports, one 10/100 Ethernet port, 5.1 channel audio and six USB 2.0 ports. Abit's original MAX boards did not feature PS/2 ports, and due to the fact that many keyboards and mice still feature PS/2 connectivity, many users were turned off. Rectifying this issue, Abit have brought back PS/2 connectors with the AT7-MAX2. The only complaint we had regarding the AT7-MAX2's featureset is the fact that it uses an AC97 audio controller. This controller is not as high quality as the C-Media controller used on the other two boards in this roundup and we do not recommend it for anything other than general windows use.

MSI's KT4 Ultra includes all of the same features as the AT7-MAX2, however, it also provided Gigabit Ethernet and Bluetooth support. Although these features

won't be very useful for the average home user, they are a god-send for businesses and large corporations.

Unfortunately, the Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra doesn't include as many onboard features as the other two boards, with only four USB 2.0 ports, one 10/100 Ethernet port and 6-channel audio.

The controller used for onboard audio on the Sovo and MSI boards was the C-Media 8738MX chip. This is a high quality controller that is even superior to some of the mid-range PCI solutions currently on the market. Also of note is that the controller supports both EAX and A3D positional audio.

The Soyo and Abit boards both provide ATA133 RAID support. However, the Abit board features a HPT374 4-channel controller,



whereas the Soyo board only features a HPT372 2-channel controller. All three boards feature SerialATA support, with the MSI and Soyo boards utilizing the Promise 20376 controller and the Abit board using the

Marvel88i8030 controller. As you can see, all three boards are certainly feature-packed.

MSI KT4 Ultra

rich board we've ever tested - clearly superior and more affordable.

Price: \$249.70 Distributor: Tech Buy URL: www.techbuy.com.au Phone: (02) 9648 1818

Final Comment: The most feature-

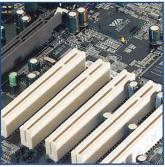
However, due to the fact that the MSI KT4 Ultra includes all of the onboard features that the AT7-MAX2 does as well as a few extras, the KT4 Ultra is currently slightly ahead of the pack.

Expansion Slots

Both the Abit and Soyo boards feature five PCI slots, whereas the MSI board features six. As with their previous MAX motherboards. Abit have included a whopping four DIMM slots, whereas the MSI and Soyo boards only feature three. None of the boards feature ISA, AMR or CNR slots, as these have finally been phased out by the superior PCI standard.

Performance

The boards were tested with an AthlonXP 2200+ processor, as well as 256MB Corsair XMS3200 memory and an Abit OTES Ti4200 graphics card. As expected, all three boards performed virtually



identically, with less than a 2% difference in every benchmark performed. This is certainly not noticeable in the real-world, so it would be foolish to draw any conclusions solely from these benchmark numbers. It is important to note that during testing, all three boards were very stable and able to run through 12 hours of the Prime95 stress test without one crash.

Price

We were quite surprised to see that all three boards are selling for around the \$400 mark. This is quite expensive for a motherboard; however, if you are going to be using the plethora of onboard features provided, the cost is well worth it.

Conclusion

After taking note of the positives and negatives of all three boards, there was one that clearly stood out from the pack. The Soyo KT400 Dragon Ultra featured one of the most impressive software bundles we've seen. Its lackluster featureset however when compared to the other boards has significantly lowered its score. In the end it goes to the MSI board which is superior in the sense that it includes an extra PCI slot and extra onboard features such as Gigabit Ethernet and Bluetooth.

Asher Moses

1000			avilla track				
Abit A	Г7-МАХ	2			210	.3	
MSI KT	4 Ultra				2	12.4	
Soyo K	T400 D	ragon U	ltra		210	0.8	

Abit GF4 Ti4200 OTES

Price: \$401.50 □ Distributor: Aus PC Market □ URL: www.auspcmarket.com.au □ Phone: (02) 9817 2899

The most noticeable feature that sets the Ti4200 OTES apart from the other Ti4200-based cards we've tested is the rather elaborate cooling solution used. Inside the all copper heatsink is a liquid-filled "heatpipe", whose purpose is to absorb heat as the heatsink gets hotter. The liquid then turns into vapor and finally condenses back into a liquid, starting the cycle all over again.

Whilst this process is occurring, the heatsink is constantly being cooled down by a 7200RPM fan, which unsurprisingly runs significantly louder than the stock heatsink/fan unit installed on most Ti4200 cards. That said, if you are purchasing this card, chances are you are an overclocker and have already packed your case with plenty of high speed fans. If this is the case, the noise level won't change much.

Due to the fact that the O.T.E.S cooling system is extremely large, Abit was forced to double the size of the card's mounting bracket, which in turn takes up the PCI slot that is directly below the AGP slot. With motherboards currently featuring up to 6 PCI slots as well as plenty of onboard features, the loss of one PCI slot shouldn't be a

problem for most of you.

Unlike most GF4 Ti4200 cards currently on the market, the Ti4200 OTES features a core clock speed of 275MHz and a memory clock speed of 554MHz. This is significantly higher than the default clock speed of the Ti4200 chipset (250/500MHz), however, it would have been foolish for Abit not to sell the card at overclocked speeds with such an extravagant cooling system installed. Finally, the card features both TV-Out and DVI-Out with a DVI-to-VGA converter included for those that plan to run dual VGA displays.

The card's overall performance was very impressive, consistently outperforming the similarly priced ATi Radeon 9000 in all benchmarks performed. Furthermore, we were able to overclock the card to a core/memory clock speed of 310/610MHz, just slightly below the Ti4600 chipset which runs at speeds of 300/650MHz.

The bottom line is, if you are an overclocker on a budget and are looking to upgrade your graphics card, at a price of around \$US180, you can't get much better than the Abit Ti4200 OTES.

Asher Moses



Abit Ti	4200 O	TES			108	84
Radeor	n 9000		S. Charle	7689		

Hercules 3D Prophet 9700 Pro

Price: \$899 Distributor: Hercules URL: www.guillemot.com.au Phone: (02) 8303 1818



ast months issue brought with it a whopping six page tech feature on the Radeon 9700, so you should all be quite familiar with this graphics chipset. With Hercules being one of ATi's main launch partners, it was unsurprising that this month we received the Hercules 3D Prophet 9700 Pro. Similar to the reference board reviewed last month, there are however a few notable differences.

Firstly, the card features a sexy blue PCB that is complemented nicely by a copper HSF unit and light blue memory heatsinks. Unfortunately, the Radeon 9700 card reviewed last issue lacked memory heatsinks and featured a rather mediocre aluminium HSF unit, which greatly limited our overclocking attempts.

We were able to overclock the card up to a core/memory frequency of 355/710MHz from the default of 325/620MHz. We were very pleased with this as it was

significantly higher than the R9700 we tested last month, which only managed to reach 351/660MHz.

Also of note is that the card features both DVI and TV outputs. In usual ATi style, TV-out quality is superb and on par, if not better than what we have seen on competing Ti4600 products.

We tested the card on a Pentium 4 2.4GHz-based system running on an Abit SR7-8X motherboard and 256MB of Corsair XMS3200 memory. As far as performance is concerned, the R9700 is simply the highest performing graphics chipset currently on the market and thus, had no trouble significantly outperforming nVidia's GeForce4 Ti4600 chipset in every benchmark performed.

The bottom line is, if you are looking for maximum performance and will spare no cost to get it, we have no trouble recommending the Hercules 3D Prophet 9700 Pro.

Asher Moses

DIVIC	II KZOC) 3E -	1024x	100 32	. DIL			
Hercul	les 3D Pi	rophet 97	00 Pro				3184	
GeFore	ce4 Ti46	00				10970		

Hercules Gamesurround Fortissimo III 7.1

Price: \$104.50 ■ Distributor: Hercules ■ URL: www.guillemot.com.au ■ Phone: (02) 8303 1818

reative may be the king of sound cards but quality comes at a price. Hercules on the other hand have made a name for themselves by fulfilling a market need for affordable soundcards. The Fortissiomo III 7.1 (FIII) represents their latest offering and we put it through its paces to hear just what it can do.

Installing the card was delightfully simple. Being a plug and play device it was immediately detected by Windows and after installing its drivers the card began to work effortlessly. There was however a problem with the "test individual speaker" function of the mixer software which simply did not work. This certainly wasn't a configuration problem on this end as other users have experienced the same problem. Hercules is aware of the issue and working to resolve it.

The performance that the FIII offers is sadly well below par. Spacialisation is poor and when either playing music or a game there is no real discernible sense of sound direction, a sweet spot, nor any acoustic separation. Treble sounds were a little muffled, bass

sounds were flat and there was a slightly noticeable hiss.

The feature set of the card looks great on paper but unfortunately, due to the poor performance doesn't really amount to much and unfortunately the huge feature list doesn't make up for the poor sound quality. Only able to process at 16 bit/48Khz this card isn't an Audigy beater, nor is it an SB Live beater. It is however an inexpensive card that is highly compatible with a number of sound standards such as: Sensaura 3D; DS3D; EAX 1 & 2; A3D; Dolby Surround; Dolby Digital and Dolby Digital EX.

As for the 7.1 sound abilities of this card it really has to be queried that if you were going to invest in a 7.1 speaker setup then why would you connect them to a \$104 card? The reality is that the CS4624 DSP that the FIII uses is an upgraded version of the Cirrus Logic motherboard sound chipset and there aren't many hardcore gamers out there that are prepared to use the on-board sound of their motherboards.

Jere Lawrence



Videologic ZXR-500 speakers

Price: \$250 **■ Distributor:** Syslink **■ URL:** NA **■ Phone:** (03) 9722 2089

t wasn't that long ago that Videologic was renowned for their PowerVR range of cards but after the demise of the PowerVR chipset and NEC's decision to produce only for the Dreamcast, companies like Videologic had to reinvent itself or die. Now producing speakers, Videologic (also known as Pure Digital) are hoping to woo the market with an affordable 5.1 solution.

Standing 250mm high, 160mm wide and 310MM deep the combined amp and sub-woofer is made of wood for better bass response and features 4 knobs that allow for control of the front, centre, rear and subwoofer volumes. A potentially annoying omission is that the ZXR-500 doesn't utilise a remote control or external master volume so if you plan on placing the subby at floor level you're going to have to "twiddle your knobs' and then use a software mixer for everyday volume adjustments. The five satellite speakers feature 80mm cone tweeters that sit behind a metal grill which may be a problem for those that prefer cloth coverings. The satellites however are magnetically shielded and are therefore safe to place beside a monitor or other magnetic sensitive device. Painted in a dull silver finish, the unit isn't very aesthetically appealing but as these are speakers, sound output is far more important than looks.

In regard to performance, the

ZXR-500 is an impressive unit that offers excellent spacialisation and good sound quality but doesn't approach the quality of say a Cambridge Soundworks setup. When listening to a 5.1 track off a DVD movie the surround sound is great although a larger centre speaker would have been preferred as dialogue can get a little washed out. Setting the centre volume higher helps but overall the middle speaker lacks "oomph". Treble was a little bright and bass was acceptable but at a very high master volume the speakers tended to distort a little.

White age

Jere Lawrence

Videologic speakers

Above average speakers at an excellent price and well suited for a multimedia PC.

85

Prolink GeForce4 MX440-8X

Price: \$291.50 ■ Distributor: Aus PC Market ■ URL: www.auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: (02) 9817 2899

eeling the heat from ATi's critically acclaimed Radeon 9000 chipset (reviewed in PCPP#79), nVidia have recently introduced the latest addition to their budget graphics chipset line, the GeForce4 MX440-8X. Based on the NV18 core, this new chipset is virtually identical to the regular GeForce4 MX440 with just a few minor modifications. Firstly, it features an extra 64MB of memory (128MB in total), runs at a core clock speed of 280/520MHz (the original MX440 was clocked at 275/400MHz) and, as you probably guessed by looking at its name, supports AGP 8x. But despite all these modifications, the chipset still has one major setback its lack of DirectX 8.1 support.

The first MX440-8X card to reach PCPowerPlay labs was manufactured by Prolink and features TV-out, DVI-out and Video In/Out provided by the Phillips SAA7114H controller. We found this controller to be of excellent quality and were actually quite surprised at how crisp an image it produced.

As far as performance is concerned, the MX440-8X is significantly slower than its main competitor, the Radeon 9000. This is clearly due to its lack of DirectX 8.1

support, as both benchmarking programs used in testing were DX8.1 based. With most current and future games being based around the DirectX 8.1 API, this could prove to be a very serious issue for many users down the road.

Furthermore, considering the fact that the recommended retail price on the card is \$399, whereas the Radeon 9000 in our comparison benchmarks can be had for around \$377, there is simply no reason to purchase an MX440-8X over the clearly superior Radeon 9000.

The bottom line is, if the MX440-8X was significantly cheaper we may have been able to recommend it to extremely budget conscious users. However, due to the fact that the Radeon 9000 is both cheaper and performs better (due to its full DirectX 8.1 support), we have no other choice but to send Prolink back to the drawing board.

Asher Moses



3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32-bit GF4 MX440-8X Radeon 9000

0000 1363 4089 5452 6815 8178 10904

Logitech MX700 cordless mouse

Price: \$189 □ Distributor: Harris Technology □ URL: www.harristechnology.com.au □ Phone: 1300 139 999



he battle rages and you meet the full ferocity of the fight head on. You do the dance, strafing and turning as weapons discharge explodes and flies by. You line up your shot, the target moves and you attempt to react accordingly but something is resisting you - your mouse cable has found something to catch on and now your once precise pointer of death is a tangled mess of inaccuracy.

For complete freedom of movement we have all been collectively longing for a high performance cordless mouse. The mouse of our dreams has arrived. The new Logitech MX700 cordless mouse is the smoothest, most accurate and precise cordless mouse to date and it's a beautiful thing to use.

Weighing in at 173g the mouse has a good solid feel to it and although it's a little heavier than your average corded mouse that's only due to the batteries inside the unit. This highlights another advantage of the MX700, this awesome mouse ships with two installed NiMH rechargeable batteries and an RF receiver that doubles as a recharging station alleviating the "pack of batteries a week" problem faced by other cordless offerings. Even better, it takes only 10 minutes to fully charge the mouse for approximately

12 hours of solid use.

we've tested all year.

In terms of features this mouse offers quite a lot of functionality with 7 buttons plus a clickable scroll wheel. This may seem like button bloat for a gaming device but at no time do they get in your way or hinder you. The reason is that the buttons are small and unobtrusive enough that it takes some serious clumsiness to hit them accidentally. Extra buttons include web page navigation (forward/backward) located on the LHS and two new buttons above and below the scroll wheel that assist in scrolling large documents. Instead of using the scroll wheel repetitively it's now possible to depress these buttons for continuous scrolling. Finally another new mouse button is a taskswapper that performs the same operation as if you had hit ALT-TAB.

Performance is simple astounding. Featuring a sample rate of 125Hz (25Hz faster than a standard cabled mouse) this pointing device is a dream to use. Whether on the desktop or in a first person shooter performance is spot on - just like using a corded mouse except you never need worry about tangles. The only real criticism that can be made is that due to the moulding, this mouse is not left handed user friendly.

Jere Lawrence

Microsoft Hardware Inputs

Distributor: Harvey Norman ■ **URL:** www.harveynorman.com.au ■ **Phone:** (02) 9201 6111 (head office)

n the on-going wars between angry people and Microsoft I am proud to say that I remain unashamedly neutral. No, I am not a Microsoft stooge nor am I on their payroll as is often implied by the anti-MS crowd towards anyone that doesn't share their hatred. It's simple really; I am only interested in the best performing product and in the struggle for gaming dominance, who cares which company made what peripheral. To that end Microsoft has continued to release a swag of high quality and useful peripherals, particularly for us gamers - now how can anyone hate a company that looks after gamers.

Blue Optical Mouse

The first and least important change to this mouse is that it now comes in blue with silver trim and a transparent scroll wheel. Other more warranted improvements have come in the form of more accurate tracking and a much smoother and responsive mouse. To clarify further though, the performance of the optical blue changes with the surface used. On the Everglide optical mousepad the mouse performed flawlessly and offered extremely precise tracking. When used on a cloth or vinyl mousepad though performance degraded significantly as "stickage" tended to occur, a problem that isn't shared by the Logitech optical mouse. The only other gripe that can be made is that the mouse's feet are not non-stick enough and attract grime. Once again this was not a problem that the Logitech optical exhibited.



When used on a slick surface performance is good with precise tracking, on other surfaces though performance will vary.

Price: \$\$59.95



Wireless Blue Optical Mouse

Basically the same colour as the following optical blue, this wireless mouse is actually relatively attractive. The previous Microsoft optical mouse was a rarity in that it was an inferior mousing product that suffered from low sampling rate and a significant lack of performance. The new wireless blue optical is an improvement over its predecessor but not enough of one. For straight windows usage this mouse is fine but for gaming we're talking useless city. The reason is that the sampling rate is still too low which unconfirmed figures place at about 47Hz. Compare this to a corded mouse which samples at 100Hz and it's easy to deduce that the wireless product offers lacks performance.

Office Keyboard

The new Microsoft Office keyboard isn't really a hot-bed of new technological innovation. rather it offers only a few new features as well as, wait for it, silver trim. Of the new features Microsoft once again got all excited about the fact that this keyboard is white, not beige -Yippee. Onto more serious info, the new office keyboard measures in at ~5cm longer than a standard keyboard and offers some handy features. On the left hand side is a back/forward web browsing button; a vertical scroll wheel; cut/copy/paste buttons and a left/right switch that replaces alt-tab and scrolls through currently active tasks. There's also the new F-lock key which activates a new subset of commands on the F-keys such as New; Open; Close and Send. This keyboard is not recommended for gaming though as the middle set of keys where ins/home/PgUp normally exist have been replaced with a strange conglomerate of keys including a delete key that is 2 keys high. The greatest omission however is that of USB ports. It is no longer possible to plug USB devices into an MS keyboard.

Natural Multimedia Keyboard

Our final keyboard, the Natural, is Microsoft's famous ergonomic input device where the keyboard is essentially cut in two and allows for those skilled at touch typing to have a far more pleasant typing experience. I will confess that I don't actually touch type, but Anthony, our editor, is a quite accomplished touch typist and highly recommends the Natural keyboard. He even confidently stated that typing speed will indeed increase with use of this keyboard. The new F-lock is also there as well as the disturbing lack of USB ports. The additional multimedia buttons on the top look stylish and perform well. Like the office keyboard, the middle set of keys have been modified which could cause problems with some games.





Microsoft

Fine for Windows or business usage useless for gaming.

Price: \$139.95

58



Excellent to type on and offers good functionality but not suited to a gamer.

Price: \$99.95

Great for touch typists
- Gamers should try
before they buy.

Price: \$119.95

72

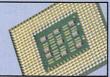
THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC **GOOD MONEY CAN BUY**

Hardware advances are becoming more sensible as opposed to more powerful. The new 3.06Ghz chip on offer by Intel may seem to only represent a speed increase of only 7.35% but in reality this chip truly screams. The reason is because the CPU can simultaneously process 2 threads, in hardware, at the same time. Excited? Stay tuned for more.



Intel Pentium 4 3.06Ghz (With Hyper Threading)

By doubling the number of controllers inside the chip, the P43.06Ghz can process two threads in hardware at the same time. The coolest thing is that the CPU usage now shows two charts, just like in Symmetric multiprocessor systems. Details to be announced



Intel D850EMD2 (850e chipset)

Hyper-Threading processor ready, this is the board you're you'll need to use the Intel Pentium 4 3.06Ghz. Supports up to 2GB of RDRAM, has a 533Mhz FSB, USB/USB 2.0, ATA100, AC97 sound and a 100Mbit Ethernet controller. Details to be announced.



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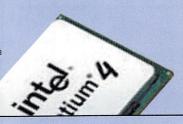


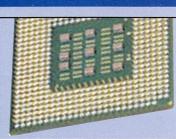
LATEST ADDITION

Intel Pentium 4 3.06Ghz

What an amazing last few months it has been. We're only just coming down from the awe that the R9700 filled us with and when we thought things couldn't get any better, they do. The new 3.06Ghz Pentium 4 uses a highly efficient process called hyper-threading to allow for the processing of two threads simultaneously. If your interests are piqued you'll just have to wait until next month for more.

Details to be announced





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ATI Radeon 9000 ATi finally manages to dethrone nVIDIA with its new budget product. \$260

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total beastie value: \$1999



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LETTER OF THE MONTH: RAID CONTROLLERS

At the time my built my PC it he gave At the time my cousin me two hard drives running off a separate RAID controller. He briefly explained the principle behind the simultaneous read-write for both the hard drives and splitting the data which in turn increased the access time for information. Since then, I've been eagerly awaiting a review of these cards in your hardware section, but as yet haven't even heard a rumour of them. How long have these cards been around? And, if the benefits of running multiple hard drives are as good as I was told they are why haven't I heard a mention of them before?

A Controllers for a Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks have been around for a while and are a server-end market item. They essentially support data protection and improved disk storage system performance. The controllers on a system board or indeed an add-in card (Adaptec, Mylex, Highpoint and Promise for example) are very useful. Lately, people have been simply using them as additional IDE controllers without fussing about RAID. Since we're a gaming magazine I don't spend much time on real wizardry in SetUp, BUT, performance boards for gamers increasingly sport a controller - so why not use it?

RAID 0 makes use of disk striping, which uses at least two drives to increase performance by means of distributing the reading and writing of data (in parallel) over 'n' number of spindles (RAID-related term for drives). This model is widely considered to be the fastest array for both

reading and writing data, but is accomplished, mind you, without any fault tolerance. Additionally, if any drive in the array fails, data on all drives making up the array are lost. In a nutshell, this is the option for systems needing exceedingly fast read and write I/O performance without regard to fault tolerance.

RAID 1 makes use of

disk mirroring, which uses two identical drives to provide fault tolerance for your data. So if one disk fails, the other is still functional and the data are retained. In theory, such a configuration introduces faster read speeds due to the multiple sources of data to read from and elevator sorting (a method of sorting data by physical location on disk so that the information is read and written to disk with reduced seek and rotational latency). Or, more simply put, data is accessed from the drive whose head is closest to it, as the other drive receives the next data access request. The write speeds, on the other hand, are equivalent to those of a single drive.

RAID 0+1 (also dubbed RAID 10) brings both striping and mirroring to the table, and requires the use of four drives. The read performance is, in theory, roughly equivalent to that of a 4-drive RAID 0 array. However, write speeds for the same array are, once again in theory, roughly equivalent to those of a 2-drive RAID 0 array. The true genius of this model is that with drives A1/B2 on one controller, and B1/A2 on the other (where same letter drives are mirrors of one another), up to two drives (only one of each letter) can fail and the data integrity remains

viable. RAID 10 eats up disk space and is not for the faint hearted or lightwalleted.

And last Just a Bunch of Disks (JBOD). This is simply a spanning of the disks, much like a volume set but at a hardware level There is no performance gain over the read/write performance of one drive. Each drive is filled up one at a time, with no parallel I/O activity, and the total amount of disk space from all drives in the set is available. Unlike a RAID 0 array, if vou loose a spindle here not all data are destroyed.

With the right motherboard and controller (MSI for example) you can stripe four disks as a series of "single striped arrays". This involves obtaining the 'IDE' driver for your board, slipping in each disk one at a time, booting, striping, shutting down, removing the drive and repeating the process with the other disks in the configuration you eventually want. This gives you a further bunch of disks to play with. One for video, one for MP3, one for disc images, one for data, you get the idea. The first IDE controller can hold any and all OS on c:\ leaving programs for the Slave on d:\ for example. Make sure you understand your configuration, what it can or can't do, and that you also understand the risk, if any, to your data should something go awry.



Water Under The Bridge

Reading more of the Reading more of the magazine, I came across Stuart's answer to a problem concerning Coasters. Quote: "Many 24B model owners backflash to 5s07 which is the most reliable." I disagree with this. I have an LTR-24102B running later firmware revision 5s57 and have had no problems at all. I've just backed up GTA3 which is protected by one of the newest versions of SafeDisc V2 so the original can be put up for safe keeping, my backups work perfectly. From what I've been reading though, the only thing that troubles the 24102B is SecuROM *new* and SecuROM V2. But, I can't see how the Mitsumi 4804TE which can read DAO-RAW +96 and will do perfect backups of these two protections when the Lite-On 24102B can also read DAO-RAW +96 will not. I have the original D2:LOD expansion pack which is protected by SecuROM V2, so in the very near future I'll try to do a backup to a rewritable CD iust to see what happens,

see if it works.
ThE NiGhTcRaWlEr

I sat on Glen's letter for A I sat on Great a few a while so that a few more issues could play themselves out. At the time of writing my first response, I was more or less correct. The Norwegian, OC-Freak, who is the Lite-on guru for CDFreaks and the rest of the planet I suspect, confirmed that Firmware v5s07 was popular because there were poor alternatives *at the time*. This of course changed between consultation and publication. However, the 24102B is a sickly dinosaur compared to what's happening in late 2002 / early 2003. Fast-forward to

now and punters have been flashing their 24103S units (basically a choked version of the 32x speed model) and 32123S units to a 40125S spec for some months now. Mind you, Lite-on do not like people playing with their binaries... I know that some people had trouble with Diablo 2 and the later expansion pack but I had no issues with my 5s07 flashed 24102B unit:) I have discussed the SecuROM issue in a little more detail in this month's Tech Column (page 30), suffice to say that you don't need a full 96 byte P-W read (or write) for SecuROM.

Speak Up?!



I recently purchased a I recently pure new PC for around \$4500. I bought the best that I could afford. The only thing I absolutely hate is the loud, intrusive, humming noise of the Volcano 7 HSF combo I can't hear the noise over my ghouls killing innocent peasants but when word processing the loud noise really does become an issue. Are there any silent or even just near silent HSF combinations. I'm willing to spend up to or around \$80.

Simon Lavigne

In my humble opinion there are quieter and more efficient HSF combinations than the

Volcanoes. In my case, with a range of fast Intel CPUs, Thermaltake just doesn't cut the mustard at achieving desirable temperatures and ves. they are noisy, bloody noisy, in fact. My experience is that it's mostly trial and error if my \$50-\$80 paper-weights are any guide. Dare I say it? Have a look at www.dansdata.com for some insanely comprehensive guidance.

WinMe and DMA

Hello, I have a problem when I enable the check box for DMA for my harddrive. When I restart, my PC either crashes or freezes and never makes it into Windows properly. The computer is basically unusable with DMA on though it's supposed to support it. I've installed the VIA 4in1 v4.42 drivers but none of them seem to help. The disk runs at UDMA 66 as this is max the motherboard can support but it can run at UDMA 100. I have a P3-800, 128MB PC133 SDRAM, SBLive! value, TNT2 M64 30.82, 20GB Quantum disk, Gigabyte 6VXE7+, WinMe with all updates.

notorious for not installing correctly at times. A mix of native drivers and VIA drivers or a corrupted driver is most likely your problem. Try these tips until DMA works for you. Uninstall the VIA driver set using the installation executable and allow WinMe to reboot and load its native drivers. Enable DMA from this point and see what happens. You can try installing an older version of the VIA 4in1 from here http://www.viaarena.com/? PageID=1 and lastly try

freshening the OS by reinstalling WinMe from within Windows.

Hot Hot Hot!

I have an ASUS A7A-1 have an ASOS AV. 266E with a 1800XP+ @ 40 degrees C running WinXP Pro with a 64MB Triplex Ti4200, a Value Live, a 60GB disk and DDR RAM. Sometimes in the middle of anything my PC just restarts like someone has pushed the reset button. Mostly in the middle of games. I put in a 450W twin fan power supply and all the latest drivers and Windows is tuned to the max. It's starting to farnarkle me.

Harry Forceflow

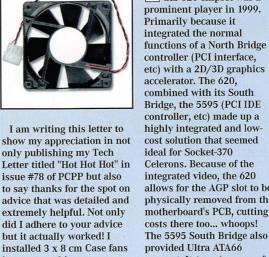
Michael



The WinMe Support Centre here http://support.microsoft.co m wasn't as specific as I'd have liked but I can suspect a few things. Set the BIOS back to 'default' or other choice from the main menu that will adjust off any conflicting settings such as inappropriate voltages, wait states or other warstoppers. Do your tweaks one at a time to see if a BIOS setting was the culprit. The BIOS versions at http://www.gigabyte.com/support/ for your 6VXE7+ motherboard provide no clues so leave flash upgrades alone. The VIA 4in1 driver set is

It's heat Harry, heat, lots of it or less likely, power brown-outs in your area. If you search the web for "resetting" or "restarts", you'll get a page of "heat", "heat" and more "heat". You have a bunch of heat producing components in a case that has poor air flow which I've talked about recently. (Note: when I become supreme leader of the world, it will be compulsory to subscribe to and read past issues of PCPP). Get some case fans, bottom front suck, rear top blow. Here's what Nathan Kiepe had to say (I don't make this stuff up):

G'day PCPP Team,



but it actually worked! I installed 3 x 8 cm Case fans into my machine, two contender on the low-end exhaust fans installed in the back of the case to suck out that harmful heated air and one fan in the belly of the mate. I had to search the PC to allow internal cooling this AGPset chip, yet you and ventilation air flow! The say it's a new motherboard? CPU now trots along nicely at 32C idle and 36C-43C full load. Also the motherboard Da LAN Tech now only just reaches 30C at full load as opposed to 39C without the fans! THANKS

New But Slow?

AGAIN PCPP! CONTINUE

I have a new motherboard

YOUR REIGN AS NUMBER

1 "PC" MAG IN AUSTRALIA!

with on-board Video (SiS 620). To my dismay Diablo runs VERRY slooowly. Now that shouldn't be right. this is a Celeron 400, 64MB of RAM. Then I bought Armada 2 and though that it would run OK the graphics flickered in game. I contacted Activision and told them about my plight and they replied "...you don't have a supported video card...buy a new one". Anyway is there anyway I can get better performance from my videocard without buying a new one???

Ben Smith

Short answer is no. The SiS 620 chipset was a allows for the AGP slot to be physically removed from the motherboard's PCB, cutting The 5595 South Bridge also support. It *was* a powerful market, with its integrated stuff. But hey, it's late 2002 "Discontinued" lines to find

stuff from my computer to the other computer which has a printer. If you could point me to somewhere that can explain it. I would be very grateful. Thanks!

Craig Byrne

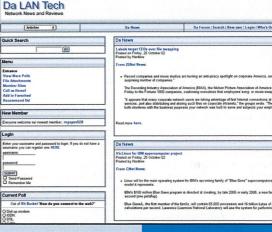
Look here www.dalantech.com, register and ask away. In my opinion it's the friendliest advice in the known universe.

Which BIOS?

I have a problem with my MoBo (ASUS A7V-E 1.01) BIOS. I upgrade the BIOS from version 1002c to 1008 but after finishing the PC cannot bootup. What will I do?

ericpar

Do you mean an A7V266-E? Incorporating the VIA KT266A chipset to support AMD Socket A processors? Are you sure the BIOS



This Way for DIY

I bought a cross over cable and a couple of network cards so that I could play some games against my brother. The games play OK, but I can't get the file sharing to work, which means I can't send

version you used was 1008? If the answer is "yes" to all questions, then you're a goose, because you've used the wrong BIOS for upgrading. You need version 1011. You'll need a professional to help you sort this out.

Ripped Off?

Recently but today in particular, I've had massive problems with WinMe. Four, that's right, four times today I've had Windows irretrievably lock up the entire computer (not even ctrl + alt + del does anything) and that's ignoring the time it just decided "hmm, now would be a nice time to reset...". I am running a crap computer: P2-300, 128MB RAM, 56x CD-ROM, 3.72 GB HDD and the only saving grace: a GeForce2 MX400



(which I also have a problem with). Anyway, if you hadn't guessed, I'm looking for a solution to this: as far as I'm aware I have the latest updates for Windows. And, my other problem is my new video card Jaton 3DForce 2 MX-64L (specs at this site: http://www.jaton.com.au/M X400STDAGP.htm) has a core and memory speed of 120 MHz, which I hear from internet sites is *FAR* below the normal 166/175





MHz that a GeForce2 MX is equipped with. Is this supposed to be like this, or have I been ripped off?

weirdguy

Windows instability is, in most cases, related to heat, corrupt hardware drivers (particularly video driver software) and bad RAM: I've talked about this extensively in previous PCPP issues. Take your pick but choose heat unless your PC case looks like the inside of a vacuum cleaner dust bag. Open your case and make sure that the GeForce cooling fan is working please be careful! Swap out your RAM with someone else's sticks and watch for instability. Finally, grab hold of the latest Detonator drivers and bung them in; then update your motherboard's chipset drivers whether Intel or whatever. The core speed of a GeForce chip is 120 MHz. The GeForce2 MX core is based off of a crippled version of the GeForce2 GTS core; the specs for your GeForce2 MX400 are a Core Speed of 200MHz and Memory Speeds of 166 MHz SDR or even 333MHz DDR.

RTCW Problem

I recently had a few friends bring their computers over to my place and everything worked fine, O3, CS and AOE2 except Return To Castle Wolfenstein. It worked on all the other computers but mine, it even worked on my brother's Celeron 366.

Anyway the problem was that everytime I tried to get into a LAN game it locked up just before it finished loading. I have an AMD1600+Leadtek GeForce4 MX440, ASUS A7A133, 256MB PC133 RAM, and a 3Com Ethernet adapter.

Wade Culling



Have you the latest drivers for everything? I know RTCW worked on the Celeron 366 but it may have no known issues like your PC configuration might have. Video drivers, sound drivers, chipset drivers and drivers for anything else you have. Your ALiMAGiK 1 chipset is a M1647 North Bridge with 1535D+ South Bridge. I strongly recommend that you visit www.ali.com.tw/ for your drivers and a possible BIOS upgrade.

Whoops!

My name is Nick and I'm 14. My brother's a subscriber so I get to read PCPP every month. I've got 2 1/2 problems and they're all shittin' me 2 tears. 1st: My

Dad tried to overclock (red storm overclocking, I've got a Soltek MoBo) and it didn't work so we changed it back. The startup has stalled now at the end of the bar and I don't know what to do 2nd: NOLF (No One Lives 4eva) was my favourite game of all time. All goes well fine until I got into the game and all the graphics are screwed up. I've changed the patch, vid card drivers, resolution and everything i can think of. My only thought left is that NOLF is incompatible with Detonator drivers. PLEASE HELP ME!!!! 3rd: This is similar to my problem above, but with Mechwarrior 4. In most of the menus, there is white gabble with all percentages signs and everything, so much i cant read the text. PLEASE HELP ME AGAIN!!!!

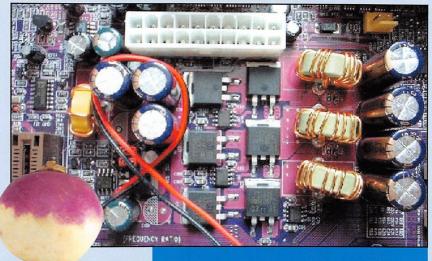
> Nick (the retarded vegetable)

issue? Did they work prior to the folly of overclocking? Thirdly, how old is your system? Here's what I think: you have an older system. NOLF worked prior to the overclocking thing. Do as I suggest above and NOLF should work again; if you can't get past a frozen splash screen then you're gonna have to discharge the CMOS. MW4 is a little unforgiving in regard to hardware and if the video drivers are corrupt then you'll get the rubbish that you see displayed. If your system is relatively new then check out the manufacturer's website for updated chipset drivers and a newer BIOS.

AGP 4x

I purchaseu a co. MX440 and when fired I purchased a GeForce4 up provides a coloured, scrambled screen. I reinstalled my GeForce2 GTS and all was fine. But when I installed the MX440 again same scrambled screen. After swapping cards a few times the MX440 worked fine and did so rebooting when the computer was warmed up. After shutting down for 30 minutes, I switched on and got the scrambled screen again. I found by accident that if the MX440 was not firmly seated the PC went beep beep; so I seated the

will beep at the POST if the video adaptor is not seated. The second issue is not so easily described. Your A7PRO like one of my motherboards is AGP 4X compliant but not necessarily AGP 2.0 compliant. I could almost say "not fully compliant" but I've been roused on before for saying such things in hardware forums. Your latest BIOS version is 1011 but the release notes are specific about what's been fixed and it's not AGP 2.0 compliance. Thinking about the cross-over that has occurred between AGP 1.0 1x/2x and AGP 2.0 4x by the board vendors and chipset makers, makes my head hurt. Some vendors have taken a perfectly good AGP 1.0 board, fiddled with it, and called it 4x. I still participate in forum discussions about this. My MSI 6337, which is "AGP 4x" will *not* play an MX440 - I've tried. You see, ASUSTek will tell me, as does MSI, that the board provides (and the chipset, the KT133 in your case) "support for AGP 2X/4X". Now, do you see any mention of AGP 2.0? No, I don't either and I'm still a little confused except that some not so old "4x" boards will play an MX440 and some won't. I suspect yours is 'in between'. I'm open to more flames and suggestion.



A Saying that there is modern game incompatibility with the Detonators is heresy! Shame on you; why do you think there's so many versions?! Firstly, discharge your CMOS by following the instructions in the Soltek handbook; reboot and reinstall all drivers as they may be corrupt. Secondly, are the NOLF and MW4 problems related to the overclocking

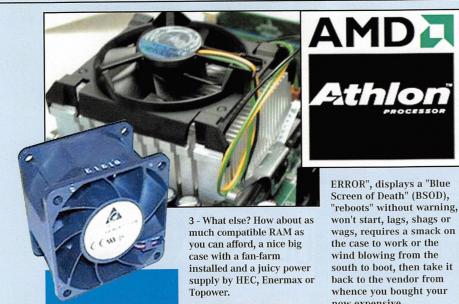
MX440 properly, reset and all was well. What's wrong? My machine is an ASUS A7PRO running a Duron 700 with 384 MB PC133 RAM with a Vibra 128, Lite-On DVD and Burner. All latest drivers.

Skeeta

There are two problems, the easy one first - just about any BIOS

Processor Pandemonia

I have a few questions for you regards processor installation. 1 - Will a motherboard mounting a 333MHz AMD K6 be able to mount an Athlon or a Duron around 1.2-1.53 GHz? 2 - What's the deal with AMD chips and



heatsink fans. 3 - Are there any other things I need to upgrade before I can install a new CPU (RAM, fans etc...)?

Ben Senghaas

Hi Ben. 1 - No. The questions you have to ask are as follows: Does the motherboard support the correct CPU voltage? Does the motherboard support the CPU formfactor?

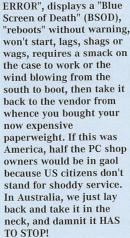
Does the motherboard support the correct BIOS? Does the motherboard



HELP! GeForce 2 problems

I've recently purchased a computer package including: an AthlonXP 1800, big Seagate HDD, GeForce2 MX400, 256MB DDR RAM, ECS Elitegroup K7S5A, integrated sound, HSP56 modem on an AMR slot. I do not know if other parts are included. For some reason I played GTA3 on my friend's P3-500, GeForce2 MX440 +TV/out and his game does not lag but for some reason GTA3 lags on my computer. I've heard of compatibility issues with the Athlon and GeForce2 but this is ridiculous. I've inserted a registry tag, and used some updates from AMD.com and my BIOS updates are up-todate, but I still have this on going problem.

vLAd_DA_mAn



Little Bucks

I currently have a P3 @ 1 GHz with 256 RAM, 40 GB disk, nVidia GeForce2 MX400, burner, DVD-ROM, 56K MODEM. I want to upgrade my PC for better performance in gaming with a quite meagre budget of \$1250. No Idea Wukaj ;)

\$1250 is not meagre by any means. I don't normally plug PC vendors but this site http://www.eyo.com.au has just proven to be reliable and friendly. Upgrade your burner while you're at it. PS - I would very much like to take that 1 gig P3 off your hands...you know my email address.







Lara Croft custom outfits? The Oracle has seen Lara with flippers. It's a hoot. There are people out there who never stopped playing with Barbie and now have a virtual Miss Croft to dress up. And good on them I say! Using the Tomb Raider Level Editor takes patience, persistence, tenacity. Next time you're stuck in a game remember Wile E. Coyote - that dude never gave up.

WRITE TO THE ORACLE AT:

The Oracle PC Powerplay 78 Renwick St Redfern **NSW 2016**

oracle@pcpowerplay.com.au



Unreal Tournament 2003

Hit ~ (tilde) to bring up console and type the following codes: GOD: God mode LOADED: All weapons
ALLAMMO: Infinite ammo GHOST: No clipping can go through walls FLY: Fly around WALK: Turns flying off and clipping back KILLPAWNS: Kills all bots BEHINDVIEW 1: 3rd person view BEHINDVIEW 0: 1st person view SLOMO #: Slow motion where # = number STAT FPS: Toggles on/off frames per second STAT NET: Toggles on/off stats display online ADDBOTS #: Add bots where # =

Sudden Strike 2

number

During gameplay press [Enter], plus one of the following: **omniscience: Disable Fog of War

blitzkrieg: Instant Victory **koenigstiger: **God Mode



The Fugitive

Well well, Mr Oracle, king of all things gaming, YEAH RIGHT! You help me first, then I will bow down to your supposed godly gaming power. A little game called the Fugitive has me stuck. I don't have a clue what to do next, I have gotten the pass off the librarian, I have gotten a spoon, I have gotten the pipe from inside the mechanic room thing, and if I wait around for 4 days, I can get a pick thing off of my lawyer, but apart from that, I don't know what to do next. This is the link so you can see that I'm not lying. http://www.pcgamer.co.uk/ games/gamefile_review_pag e.asp?item_id=457

Microphone Joe

A Impudent worm! You dare challenge the Oracle's power?! BLASPHEMER!! Bow down and worship me because I am indeed THE ORACLE!! A cur like you isn't worthy to lick my boots. You deserve to be publicly pilloried for your insolence; instead the Oracle magnanimously gives the answer. Your time to grovel starts now.

Day 1: Get spoon from dining room. Get the pipe from the shop using metal detector. Use pipe with the weight lifting guy. In the library get the book on the table and give it to the librarian, then get the card when he leaves. Night 1: Use the pipe on the cell door and head towards the gym. In an open cupboard there's a letter to pick up. Then pick up the trumpet from another prisoner's cell. Day 2: Give the girlfriend's letter to the guy and use the trumpet on the boy in

the church. Pick up a book from one of the prisoner's cells and read it to learn the password. Night 2: Leave your cell and go to the security office. Use the access card with password. Inside look for a money box and glasses. Day 3: Use pipe to open money box and get coin. Give glasses to the foreigner. Night 3: Get your photo taken. Day 4: Check out the cake and talk to the man at the soccer field. Night 4: Use the pick on the broken wall. Talk with the man in the cell, get the thumbtack. Go and talk to the boy who's making your pass. Day 5: Use the pass with the prison officer. Grab toilet paper from the toilet. Give a ping pong racquet to the guy watching TV and follow him when he goes to take a shower. Grab his clothes. Give toilet paper to the guy in the loo. Use thumbtack with boxer. Get hair from the hairdresser. Night 5: Use x-ray glasses in the security office. Pick up underpants and wash clothes. Day 6: Use underpants with meditating man. Speak to the doctor and use ribbon with hair. Night 6: Open safe, get certificate. Use officer's clothes, use beard and use the certificate to escape the camp. There you have it, the walkthrough for the very obscure 1999 game The Fugitive.

Keep grovelling. I

can stop yet.

Mafia

I recently purchased Mafia and it is a great game, but I am stuck on the level where you get the race car and race on the track. I just can't stop doing burnouts and I can't control the car, could you please give me tips so I can get past the level.

Dieter Smith

Like driving in real life, this takes practice and more practice. If you can't manage it in automatic transmission then try it in manual instead. Use the A and Z keys to go up and down gears, X is the clutch. Stay in 2nd gear for the whole lap and go up to 3rd only to accelerate on the final

raceway. Don't go down to 1st gear after braking unless you've spun and need to accelerate again. Make sure you're in 2nd gear for the left turn at the cliff. Tap the left and right arrows rather then holding them as you turn. Stay away from other cars. Brake before corners - if the corner is not sharp then stop pressing forward for a second will be sufficient. Generally you should stay on the road, but try this: At the first hairpin corner turn onto the grass the moment your car gets there. This should make you first so use the radar to see where the other cars are.ends. Grab the ammo and first aid kit in Asgaya's hut before you go.



Medal of Honour

Do you know how to win Medal of Honor Allied Assault, because that is one of the best games ever.

Paul, e-mail

I like you Paul - no wishy-washy indecisiveness here! In this mission you have to save your POW buddies, plus infiltrate Fort Schmerzen to plant explosives on the main fuel units, resulting in much mayhem. You begin on a train, and must kill 15 or more snipers in 30 seconds more then 9 POW casualties equals failure. Then unlock the cell block, free the POWs: Pick off the snipers in the warehouse, plus 5 hidden guards inside. You also must get the guys with the MG42s.

Now talk to the POW at locked gate and return to the locked door to find your POW pals have wired it up. When it explodes, let them go in first, then deal with the guards that come for you. Go inside, use the MG42 gun on the guards to the right. Use grenades and

bounce them off walls to take out guards in passage ways. Find the lift and the 100 health pack.

Go down hall to the maintenance room, keeping left - lots of guards here. Near the main fuel line valve (crouch under the pipe to turn it on) is a sniper on the walkway. Run back upstairs to the lift and take lift to the inner facility with Sten gun ready for when it stops. Go to last door on left and down the ladder. Go down next hall; using grenades on the sniper in the hallway with crates. In the next room go right, then go to the empty doorway, look around and take out 2 guards at the end. Go to where they were, turn left, enter next hall, turn left at corner. Enter next door, along a winding path towards the lift. As you get near the hallway, use your sniper as the barracks are close by. Hug left wall to reach the dormitory doorway. Use a grenade then rush in. Repeat for other 2 dormitories. The room at the end of the hallway has health



Deus Ex

I'm playing Deus Ex, and I am stuck in New York where I have to align the 3 satellite dishes and then send the distress call to the NSF. I can't get the dishes aligned! I reposition the first dish, then the next and so on, but they all end up in different directions. Even if I align each dish in a different order, they still all end up facing different directions, and the game only lets me reposition each dish ONCE.

Tim Sawtell

What lucky rebels those NSF are having you to rely on! You can't work out this puzzle? Just don't take up safecracking whatever you do. Before you align the satellite dishes you need the right codes.
Ok, you're in the NSF HQ basement. I hope you made it through the laser fields and turrets here. You can jump and hide to avoid them or use multitools to disable the fields. Did you

deactivate the cameras by entering the codes tjefferson and newrevolution in the security terminal? Now in the backroom of the basement, blow open or lockpick a filing cabinet and pick up the datacube which gives you Paul's information about UNATCO's shady affairs, plus vital codes to activate the communications equipment. Go upstairs to the NSF HQ roof and enter the structure next to the satellite. Use the computer (logon mcollins: password revolution) then click on everything to align the satellites. Open the door to the next room and use the second computer (login napoleon; password revolution), then press the button to broadcast the message. Be prepared as displeased UNATCO forces will come looking for you with orders to shoot on sight. To

get back

to the 'Ton Hotel and meet up with your brother, Paul, either sneak your way back, fight your way out or else use speed enhancement to run and jump. Talk to Paul, stick around and help fight the MIBs that show up. You have to get to Jock's helicopter in Battery Park without dying - so sneak and take the subway. If you make it to the subway alive you'll run into Anna and have to kill her. But it's no biggie if you die on the way you will still get to the next mission.





Beach Life

Type these codes during gameplay: costa del dosh: Unlimited money quick quick quick!: Fast construction all buildings: All buildings unlocked [Shift]+[Alt]+[\$]: Extra \$5,000 [Shift]+[Alt]+[F10]: All mission levels [Shift]+[Alt]+[F9]: All sandbox levels

Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom

Press [Ctrl] + [Alt] + C to display console window, then enter on of the following: shake shake: Earthquake glub glub: Flood delian treasury: 5,000 Delians gimme goods: Obtain resources black death: Kills all units Kill enemy units: kills enemy

Kill loan units: kills loan units i win again: win mission

Medieval: Total War

Type these in the strategic mode (on map):
.worksundays.: Fast Construction deadring.: 1 million florins
.mefoundsomecu.: plentiful copper supplies

.viagra.: plentiful iron supplies .mefoundsomeau. plentiful gold supplies .mefoundsomeag. plentiful silver supplies

.conan. : play as rebels. WARNING this code is irreversible .matteosartori. : show entire map

.matteosartori. : snow entire map .badgerbunny. : unlock any building and train any unit



Pointless DVD Cheats

Alien

Choose "Scene Selections" option at main menu, then press Right to highlight the right window and press Enter to see see info about the Nostromo and crew.

Choose "Extra Features" screen, press Down to highlight acid pool at bottom of screen. and press Enter to see info on the alien's life cycle compiled by Kane.

Icewind Dale 2

Cheat mode: Go to the configuration utility and enable the cheat console. During game play press [Ctrl]+[Tab] to display console window and enter one of the following:

ctrlaltdelete:hans(): Teleport selected party members to pointer ctrlaltdelete:midas() : 500 gold pieces ctrialtdelete:addgold (<number>): Total gold amount of your choice ctrlaltdelete:explore area(): Full map for current area ctrlaltdelete:setcurr entxp(<number>): Set experience ctrlaltdelete:setcha pter(<0-6>): Go to chapter intro; (Prologue is chapter

ctrlaltdelete:moveto area("AR<number>"): Go to indicated area; view data directory of disk 2 for name. ctrlattdelete:createi tem("<item name>",<number>): Spawn indicated number of items.
ctrlaltdelete:createc reature("<creature number>"): Spawn
indicated creature ctrialtdelete:addspel I("<spell name>"): Selected character gains indicated spell.

After typing ctrlaltdelete:enablech eatkeys() press any of the following keys: [Ctrl] + A: Scroll forward through available character sequences [Ctrl] + S: Scroll reverse through available character [Ctrl] + C: Replay chapter introduction [Ctrl] + F: Turn selected character around its axis
[Ctrl] + M: Debug dump with area information [Ctrl] + J: Teleport party to pointer [Ctrl] + Y: Kill

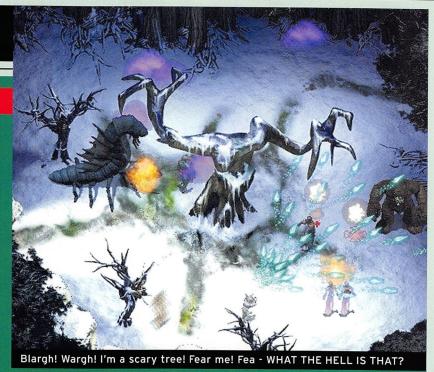
selected unit [Ctrl] + K: Kill selected monster or remove character from party [Ctrl] + R: Heal selected character or portrait [Ctrl] + U: Receive free experience [Ctrl] + X: Display current pointer position and search [Ctrl] + 1: Cycle through armour levels [Ctrl] + 2: Fade screen to dark [Ctrl] + 3: Fade screen to light
[Ctrl] + 4: Display trigger polygons [Ctrl] + 6: Transform current selected character into the next one [Ctrl] + 7: Transform current selected character into the previous one
[Ctrl] + 9: Display character bounding

To create items type in ctrlattdelete:createi tem("<item name>",<number>) code. Note: items must still be identified and some items can only be spawned once

OOBELTO3: Belt Of OOBOOTO2: Boots Of Stealth OOBOOTO3: Boots Of The North OOBOOTO4: Boots Of Avoidance OOBOOTO5: Boots Of Grounding **OOBRACO3:** Bracers Of Defense +3 **OOBRACO4:** Bracers Of Defense +4 **OOBRACO5:** Bracers OOCHANÓ6: Baleful OOCHANO7: Elven Chain of the Hand **OOCHANO8:** Armor OOCHANO9: Ogien's OOCLCKO2: Cloak Of Protection +3

OOCLCKO3: Cloak Of

Displacement



OOCLCKO4: Cloak Of Non-Detection **OOHFAXBA:** Battle Axe: Scales of Balance OOHFAXBB: Great Axe: Cowards Flight 11HFAXEW: Great Axe: Executioner's OOHFAXSC: Throwing Axe: Screaming Axe OOHFAXSP: Battle Axe: Death's Ally OOHFBCAG: Bow: Mithril Arc OOHFBLFK: Bow: Triumphant Flamekiller OOHFBSEH: Bow: Swift Eye of the Hunter OOHFBSRS: Bow: Furious Rabbit Slayer OOHFCBHK: Club: Club of Confusion **OOHFDGFW:** Dagger: Dagger of Closing Arguments **OOHFDGPF:** Dagger: Ysha's Sting OOHFHBDC: Halberd: Hand of the Buccaneer OOHFHBHL: Halberd: Holy Hammer of Lucerne оонгнмрн: **OOHFHRSC:** Warhammer: Hammer of Lightning OOHFHXHF: Crossbow: Folly of Hagnen Odestone **OOHFHXIA:** Crossbow: Mithril Arbalest OOHFHXMR: Crossbow: Shielded Mailripper **OOHFLXHF:**

Foolishness of Hagnen Odestone OOHFLXIM: Crossbow: Iron Mary's Bold Reply OOHFLXMB: Crossbow: Makavail's Swift Bane OOHFMEAR: Mace: Glowing Azure Rod OOHFMECF: Mace: Iron Hand of Ohanion **OOHFMRMG:** Morningstar: Lathander's Gift **OOHFMRMS:** Morningstar: Mountains of Selune OOHFSBBS: Bastard Sword: Know Thy Family OOHFSBRC: Bastard Sword: Order's Nemesis **OOHFSBWR:** Bastard Sword: Bloody Wroth **OOHFSCCS:** Scimitar: Caernach's Silver Sickle OOHFSDT: Great Sword: Dwelnar's Folly **OOHFSFDD:** Stave: Delnar's Lightning OOHFSLDB: Long Sword: Delnar's

Healing Blade
OOHFSLDY:

Long Sword:

OOHFSRIM: Spear: Life's

Short Sword:

Sword of

Gleaming

Dykahst

Drinker OOHFSSLS:

OOHFSSTD: Short Sword: Shame of Thy-Dunag OOSTAF86: Stave: Phantom Staff 00STAF89: Stave: Staff of Fireballs OOWANDO1: Wand OOWANDO2: Wand Of Magic Missiles OOWANDO3: Wand Of Paralyzation OOWANDO4: Wand OOWANDO5: Wand Of Lightning OOWANDO6: Wand Of Sleep OOWANDO7: Wand Of Summon Monster OOWANDO8: Wand Of The Heavens



kits and gas mask to pick up. Now take out your Sten gun and kill the guards coming up in the lift. Take the lift down, putting on gas mask and crouching to see the enemy first when lift stops. Go forward and left, clearing room. Kill sentry in hall and stop at the doorway. Inch forwards and lob a grenade to bounce near a pillar. Clear room then take left hallway. Kill the guard across from you and move to corner. You are now close to the scientists and poison gas. Peer around the corner and shoot at gas container to kill those Nazi scientist scum. Use key on each valve.

Plant explosives and you've got 20 seconds to get back to the lift and go back up. Just run for it, killing as many Nazis as you can but don't stop or you'll die from burns, not to mention bullets. At the fade out, kill the sentry on the left and the soldier in the room behind him. You have a few seconds left to run outside, ignoring the sniper towers and guards, grab health from an upended table and bolt for the train.

Dungeon Siege

I am stuck on the fourth part of Dungeon Siege. I have rescued Merik from the ice caves but I can't find his staff. I think that it is in the dark forest in the temple where you have to put things on the pressure plates and then use the levers but I can't work out the last part would you please help me. Thanks, Jase.

Jason Jones

Although Merik tells you about his Warding Staff after being rescued, you have a long way to go before you'll lay eyes on it. That's the beauty (or should I say dullness?) of Dungeon Siege, incredibly long dungeons that take forever to work through. Still, if your appetite is keen then pay heed. Jeriah's Trading Post offers you the chance to restock for the long slog ahead (similar to those signs on the highway that say last petrol for 200 kms). Next is a long underground dungeon to the south. Past that is a dark forest where you had to kill the bandit boss. The temple here has the Lost Witch in it and some treasure chests but no staff. Trial and error to get those levers to open, Jase, and a bit of persistence. Next, stop to chat with the Azunite Scholar happily dying on the bridge and he'll give you the Purify the Temple quest. The temple is in the Eastern Swamp and there's a lot of swamp to cover. Enjoy that grey murky water! Deep in the swamp you'll find the entrance to the Goblin Caves. This is another huge, long dungeon. But here at last you'll get the Warding Staff after killing a boss mob. Just make sure you purify the temple first before going into the Goblin Caves.

After the swamp, the Goblin Caves are dry and warm as those goblins are a dab hand at using a flamethrower, so watch out or you'll be toast.





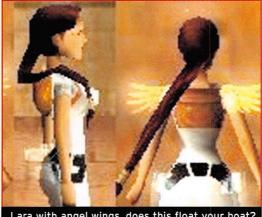
I have cloned Eyore! Now no one can stop me!

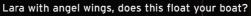


The current leader in the Most Overused Dungeon Siege Image comp

Tomb Raider IV- The Last Revelation









I've been told about a patch to give Lara angel or devil wings in each mission, and also to become any character in the game. There's also a cheat (supposedly) to make Lara into an angel or the devil, and use their attacks. I have searched for months and months through every search engine created, and have had no luck; yet... I've seen my friends with this cheat on (Lara with angel wings flying around level one! Please tell me how this happened.

Keefe Heydon, SA

Keefe, you need better friends, these ones sound like a right slack bunch. There are custom outfits you can download to give Lara either an angelic or devilish makeover. She doesn't get any special powers but sure looks purty. You'll need the Tomb Raider Level Editor and will have to install and convert the files into the appropriate directory. ALWAYS make a backup copy first before you start. Get the Tomb Raider Level Editor here: http://www.tombraiderc hronicles.com/tr5/editor /index.html Get snazzy outfits for Lara at: http://trsearch.tripod.com/ cgi-bin/TRSearch.cgi http://www.laraslevelbase.org/member/tr tailor/ Tutorial on how to install custom files: http://driber.geckokid.com/ tr/tutorials.html Highly helpful forums: http://forums.eidosgames.c

om Look in the Tomb Raider Level Editor section for threads discussing

installation.

NWN Penultima

For: Neverwinter Nights ■ Version: 1.1 - 1.4 ■ Size: 6 modules - 350K each ■ URL: pixelscapes.com/penultima/index.html ■ Rating: 5/5



Penultima is a six-module campaign set in the fictional kingdom of the same name. Unlike the main NWN game, Penultima pokes fun at plenty of traditional fantasy conventions and there is an excellent tongue-in-cheek sense of humour which pervades the entire campaign. Fans of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series will feel completely at home in Penultima, but diehard fantasy game traditionalists may want to look elsewhere, although the campaign does revert back towards more serious RPG gaming towards the end.

Thankfully, rather than simply offering a few lame fantasy parodies, Penultima also has a clever and entertaining storyline which drives the action throughout. The modules are varied enough to keep things fresh yet still feel like integral parts of the overall campaign. There is a nice mix of gameplay modes as well, from combat-orientated dungeon hacks, to side quest-driven missions, to traditional RPG exploration affairs. The witty dialogue and zany characters (ninja chickens, an agnostic cleric, the Guild of

Middlemen) players meet along the way are easily the best things about the modules, and the final module finishes with a bang and flourish.

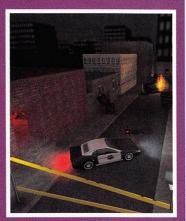
These modules are recommended for characters at experience levels three to six although jumping in with a brand new character is also relatively easy enough. There are many creative puzzles on offer with subtle, well thought out clues so players will need to bring their brains as well as their swords.

Penultima has consistently been placed in the top three downloaded mods on Bioware's site for some time and it's really no surprise. Legions of fans have claimed that parts of the modules are better than the main fare offered by Bioware. Check it out and decide for yourself. With a mod this good, you really can't lose. The even better news is that two more campaigns set in Penultima are on the way.

Digital Paintbal

For: Half-Life ■ URL: www.digitalpaintball.net ■ Rating: 4/5

While a heap of fun, real life paintball can be an expensive affair, particularly if you happen to have an itchy trigger finger. So what better way to get all the excitement of the real thing with this extremely true-to-life mod. Notable features include a host of play modes, fast multiplayer skirmishes, beautifully modelled guns and attachments, together with a well-balanced credits system which is used to purchase arms, ammunition, and equipment. This mod offers the thrills of paintball without the pain of copping a pellet in the ear or worse, in the family jewels.



UT Jungle Warfare

For: UT/UT 2003 ■ Version: Beta ■ Size: 52 MB ■ URL: planetunreal.com /junglewarfare ■ Rating: 4/5

ather than jumping on the WWII or Vietnam-inspired bandwagon, this class-based team mod tosses history out the window. Instead it adopts a blanket approach to all things jungle, throwing players into settings ranging from Laos to Kandahar to Nicaragua. It's all basically the same swamps, vegetation and climate, right?

Players can choose to side with either the Marines or the traditional Guerrillas. Whilst each team has their own names for the five different classes available (infantry, scout, medic, sniper, and heavy weapons), they are all essentially the same for both teams. Thankfully, each class is assigned their own weapon set which helps with variety in gameplay, making each of the classes distinct, and fun to try out and learn. Another bonus is that each class has their own unique skin and load out which gives this mod a bit of professional credibility.

At this stage, apart from the main class game, there are only two game modes available - Sabotage and CTF - although more will undoubtedly be added with a full release version. Both are selfexplanatory and, unfortunately, play very similarly; the same tactics tend to apply to both. Luckily, the mod team has done an excellent job of capturing the knife-edge tension of jungle warfare and combining it with some frantic gameplay, making all of the modes tremendously fun to play. Unlike many team-based mods, there is a real need for communication and to work with other team members.

Jungle Warfare features a semirealistic aiming system which discourages moving firefights and Rambo tactics. Surprisingly, the damage system is much more forgiving, with players able to sustain a huge number of hits. No Ghost Recon-type one shot kills here.

This beta version does not feature full weapon animations and also still contains a few bugs which the mod team has promised will be ironed out via an update or by the time a proper version is released. The bugs are all minor and don't really affect gameplay too much, apart from some graphic-intensive maps not being available for online play.

This is a mod for players who enjoy teamwork-focused FPS games where the emphasis is action rather than on over-realism and getting every historical detail correct. Boasting an already impressive selection of weapons, some excellent maps, and the promise of a migration to the UT2003 engine, players should keep their sights on this mod.

The Cyber Menace

For: Serious Sam 2 ■ URL: www.defensivegames.com/finalstrike ■ Rating: 3/5

Mod teams just love space marines for some reason. It must be the everlasting legacy of Hudson and Hicks from Aliens. Thankfully Final Strike, a teambased multiplayer mod, has some excellent maps, resource management, and objectives to support an otherwise tired premise, because the storyline borrows heavily from games like Red Faction. Players join teams of either marines or Cyborg miners and battle it out with a juicy arsenal of weapons and vehicles at their disposal.





Monster Hunt

For: Unreal Tournament ■ URL: www.unreal2.co.za/mh ■ Rating: 3/5

mod does just enough in the graphics and fun department to keep its head above water and not end up drowning like the horde of mod also-rans. There are only two play modes - Monster Hunt and Monster Arena - with the second being by far the mode of choice. Arena is simply an all-out blood bath against a single powerful baddie whereas Hunt is an entertaining frag fest against an assortment of monsters that will really test teamwork and cooperation.



REQUESTS

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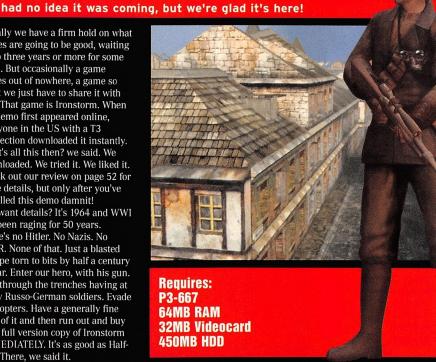


ell here we all are then, our first DVD PowerPlay without an anime episode on it. There are a couple of reasons for why we've left out your monthly dose of Japaneseflavoured cartoon fun, but first and foremost it's because there were so many fat demos released this month that we just had to boot the anime we needed every byte of the 4.6GB capacity of the disc. The other reason was that we've done 8 anime episodes in a row, and we really didn't want to exhaust Madman's supply before the year was out. However, further research has since revealed that there indeed appears to be no end to the supply of anime, since Australia has some 20 years of catching up to do gith Japane. So next issue, who knows? Maybe anime will make a return. But only if there's enough space: demos come first. Which brings us to the goodies on offer this month. We start you off with a big chunk of Ironstorm, then refresh the palate with FIFA 2003 before really starting to get down into the degustation - 20 demos to gorge yourselves on. So enjoy! And remember, write in and let me know what you liked, what you hated, and what you want to see on the next exciting installment of the PCPP DVD!

Paul Noone cdgod@next.com.au

IRONSTORM

Usually we have a firm hold on what games are going to be good, waiting up to three years or more for some titles. But occasionally a game comes out of nowhere, a game so great we just have to share it with you. That game is Ironstorm. When the demo first appeared online, everyone in the US with a T3 connection downloaded it instantly. What's all this then? we said. We downloaded. We tried it. We liked it. Check out our review on page 52 for more details, but only after you've installed this demo damnit! You want details? It's 1964 and WWI has been raging for 50 years. There's no Hitler. No Nazis. No USSR. None of that. Just a blasted Europe torn to bits by half a century of war. Enter our hero, with his gun. Run through the trenches having at nasty Russo-German soldiers. Evade helicopters. Have a generally fine time of it and then run out and buy your full version copy of Ironstorm IMMEDIATELY. It's as good as Half-Life. There, we said it.



COMBAT MISSION 2

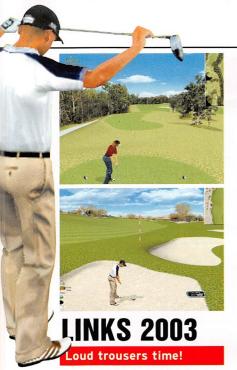
Barbarossa to Berlin, in style!

Starting with the German invasion of Russia in 1941 through to the 1945 storming of Berlin, the player is able to fight with historically accurate forces and equipment of 7 nations from the Black Sea in the South to the Arctic Circle in the north. Experience combat in a full 3D battlefield as tracers arc overhead and exploding shells shake the earth! Feel the tremendous power of the feared Russian Katyusha rocket barrage! Order a tank hunter team to assault a heavy KV-1 with Panzerfausts and magnetic mines in the ruins of a shattered city! A modern hybrid turnbased/realtime system combines with 3D lines of sight, misidentification of targets, location by sound, advanced armor penetration systems, morale and leadership, fire and smoke, wind

and weather - and much more to bring you unprecedented realism from the people who revolutionised the wargaming genre.



Requires: P3-433 **128 MB RAM** 32MB Videocard 100MB HDD



Oh veah golf! Gaming just doesn't get any more exciting does it? Stand there in a prerendered landscape, slicing, jabbing and putting your way to exhilirating VICTORY! Lookit people, the BALL is IN the HOLE! Yeah! I'm so 133+ my brain just exploded! Seriously though, if golf is your thing then Links 2003 is the golf sim for you. Frighteningly detailed, excitingly accurate, in this trial version, you will be able to play Sergio Garcia using the new Real Time Swing option. Included in the trial version are five different modes of play available, in addition to the ability to compete head-tohead online. The featured course will be the back nine holes of Skeleton Coast. the new fictional golf course designed exclusively for Links 2003.

Requires: P2-400 128MB RAM 16MB Videocard 400MB HDD

THE GLADIATORS

Why can't we just all get along?

This much-anticipated action/RTS looks good. Very good. So what's it all about? "The people have grown weary of the endless power struggles at court between the pretenders to the throne. The pretenders to the title, the Regent, Princess and the Chamberlain, resolve to use circus games as a means of settling the succession, and each selects a champion to defend their colours.' Pick your side and fight to the death in the arena, where not just your lif but also the survival of your species is at stake.† While combat rages the Powers themselves do battle in the wings to spur their heroes on to victory. This demo allows you to play one campaign in this futuristic, action-packed real-time strategy game from Eugene Systems.

Requires: P2-300 128 MB RAM 16MB Videocard 300MB HDD RAM





MOTOCROSS STUNT RACER

Ouch, that's going to leave a stain

"Delivering liquid smooth 3D gaming, full 3D models, real-time shadow casting & surface removal, a full physics system, and enough levels to choke on—it's all in there." Well, that's what the developers say anyway. It takes you back a few years and also takes a little getting used to but, at the very least, this tiny game is a lot of fun. The full game can be bought at the official site, but here's the demo to give you the opportunity to try it out. It allows you to play 5 tracks out of the 20 available in the level stage of the game.



Requires: P2-300 16MB RAM 8MB Videocard 5MB HDD

WWII: PANZER CLAWS

Biggest demo ever?



This massive demo, clocking in at a stuperifous 320MB, is a real-time strategy game that depicts the struggles in war-torn Europe between 1941 and 1944. The player takes control of a variety of armoured and mechanised vehicles, ground troops and air support units in epic World War II battles of skill and nerve. The game spans the German attack on the Soviet Union through to other important battles on the Eastern Front,

Requires: P2-450 128MB RAM 32MB Videocard 1GB HDD

operations in France and Italy to the German offensive in the Ardennes. You can play as German, Soviet or Allied troops in both the single player campaign mode and multiplayer modes. The game is the first to use Reality Pumpís newly developed ëEarth-3í engine, which enables stunning graphics and spectacular levels of detail. Keep your eyes peeled for up-coming mods, then let us know where they are so we can nab them.

NECROMANIA

Loud trousers time!

Are you bored of playing PC games in the role of a good, handsome and peace-loving hero, whose only task is to smash hordes of enemies for the sake of peace, love and understanding? You can swap the roles in Necromania - a new action and strategy fantasy game, and choose from seven dark characters.

There are four worlds with many grim levels full of traps and opponents waiting for you. Using traps and special skills that each character masters increases your chances for survival.

Requires: P2-400 128MB RAM 16MB Videocard 200MB HDD



THE PHARAOH'S CURSE

Someone's opened the Cameron Files

An ancient ritual revisited awakens a Pharaoh long dead and entombed (Right, I'll get my good rucksack -Ed). Alan P. Cameron is back on the case in this new adventure. As Cameron, piece together the clues to discover the real reason why the mummy is missing. Investigate the kidnapping of one of the members of an archeological team, travel the Nile on a steamboat, explore the Cairo Museum of Antiquities, meet a cast of interesting characters and solve the mystery behind the empty tomb. Exotic locations, danger, mystery and intrigue await.



Requires P-166 16MB RAM 8MB Videocard 100MB HDD

TROPHY HUNTER 2003

YOU'RE ALL SICK, YOU HEAR ME? SICK!

So what's better than gunning down zombie Nazis from the distant future and/or Pluto? Why, it's lying in wait for a gentle doe, armed with a .50 automatic rifle with laser tracking and grenade launcher. No wait, there's something better than that again in fact, it's the ability to virtually slice the virtual head off the gentle doe you just blew away and then mount the grisly trophy on your the wall of your redneck den. Still, if you must hunt, this game takes it all pretty damn seriously.

Requires: P2-300 16MB RAM 8MB Videocard 5MB HDD

HE REST OF THE DVD

With more than 4GB of stuff on the DVD we can't possibly list it all here on two tiny pages. Whack the DVD in your drive and browse Paul's excellent DVD interface. Every item is given a detailed description including system requirements and a relevant URL for further webbased research! DVD PowerPlay, it's simply the best disc in the business. Enjoy it, for it is all for you!

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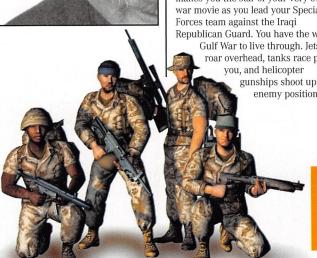
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nother month, another dozen quality demos for your delectation. Like your sensible, technologically well-adjusted betters who get the DVD version every issue, your undoubted favourite demo this time around will of course be Ironstorm. It's massive, it's epic, it's full of classic alternate-history moments but also tanks. So take to the trenches with your sten-gun and your sniper rifle and give those nasty Russo-Germans what for! This demo sees you in search of the chapel, and access to the enemy lines. Can you do it? It's a race against the clock! Well, if you consider the other 11 demos on the CDs as a kind of clock, chiming constantly for your attention...

> **Paul Noone** cdgod@next.com.au





We had no idea it was coming, but we're glad it's he Requires: P3-667 **64MB RAM** 32MB Videocard 450MB HDD

Usually we have a firm hold on what games are going to be good, waiting up to three years or more for some titles. But occasionally a game comes out of nowhere, a game so great we just have to share it with you. That game is Ironstorm. When the demo first appeared online, everyone in the US with a T3 connection downloaded it instantly. What's all this then? we said. We downloaded. We tried it. We liked it. Check out our review on page 52 for more details, but only after you've installed this demo damnit! You want details? It's 1964 and WWI has been raging for 50 years. There's no Hitler. No Nazi's. No USSR. None of that. Just a blasted Europe torn to bits by half a century of war. Enter our hero, with his gun. Run through the trenches having at nasty Russo-German soldiers. Evade helicopters. Have a generally fine time of it and then run out and buy your full version copy of Ironstorm IMMEDIATELY. It's as good as Half-Life. There, we said it.

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

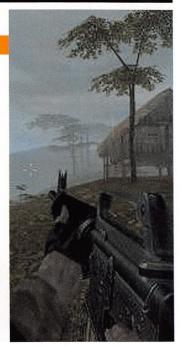
It's topical! And topical is good!

Conflict: Desert Storm places you right in the middle of the action. It makes you the star of your very own war movie as you lead your Special Republican Guard. You have the whole

Gulf War to live through. Jets roar overhead, tanks race past gunships shoot up enemy positions.

Take your squad in hand (as it were) and blast your way through a selection of high-action missions in pursuit of the ultimate quarry: that guy with the moustache who is still to this day in charge of the place, more than 10 years after the yanks trounced his pathetic Republican Guard. Unfortunately we were unable to confirm whether or not the amusing antics of Marky Mark and Ice Cube are included in this demo. Perhaps you can ferret them out? With explosive ferrets?

Requires: P3-450 128MB RAM **16MB Videocard** 150MB HDD



WWF RAW

Punch him in the ring!

We mean the wrestling ring, what's the matter with you people? Honestly. In WWF Raw, you can battle the superstars of the WWF. The game offers TV style presentation with in-game cut-scenes and always a "double feature" replay. It has dynamic lighting effects and fully scaled arenas. It's like having your very own pro wrestling tournament!

It includes just about every wrestler ever represented in the WWF, including The Rock, Kane, Chris Jericho, Billy Gunn and - my favourite - Hardcore Holly.

If you're a fan of WWF, this demo is a must see. If you're anyone else then I'd avoid it like the plague.
Playability is a goddamn joke. The visual are good enough and some other elements (like the interface) have been done well but, for the most part, I thought it sUxORed. The demo allows you to play a single player match as The Rock ONLY.



Requires: P2-700 64MB RAM 16MB Videocard

SPRING BREAK

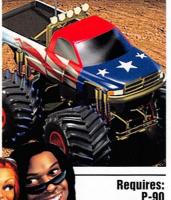
Bikinis in a game? Revolution!

Build an Ibiza-like resort, set the prices and watch all the holidaymakers have fun in the sun. Here you will experience all the joys and the headaches of running a holiday resort from romance to storms. Beach Life offers the gamer something different to what they've ever experienced before. The game features the management options of a Tycoon style game with the people watching

RC RACERS DELUXE

Are you an RC driver? Or are you a mouse?

This is a fun little game that may appeal to those looking for a budget racing game. If you liked Micro Machines then this should give you a few hours of enjoyment too. Experience the excitement of RC car racing with 3D Ultra Radio Control Racers as souped-up toy cars battle for position on outlandish racing tracks with hidden shortcuts and interfering animated creatures. And see every exciting jump, collision, spinout, and wipeout on the course with your unique Driver's Stand viewpoint. In this demo you can race two of RC Racer's four RC vehicles on one of the game's 16 tracks. You can race against computer-controlled cars or another person.



Requires: P-90 32MB RAM 8MB Videocard 40MB HDD

intrigue of The Sims.
You must build and
run your island while
reacting to the needs of
your guests and then
watch the hilarious

consequences. Graphically Beach Life features a beautiful, scrollable isometric world with a very simple interface.

Requires: P2-350 64MB RAM 8MB Videocard 350MB HDD

ARCHANGEL

Techno-horror-fantasy!

Archangel is a third person game (with first person view option) which combines both the RPG and action genres. Players face a variety of plausible and intelligent NPCs and many other peripheral figures who take an active part in the action. Archangel takes place in three different epochs and locations. The game is a blend of techno-thriller, horror and fantasy. The demo allows you to play a portion of the full game but details on its contents are sketchier than Quake's backstory.

Requires: P2-433 128MB RAM 32MB Videocard 300MB HDD





Shoot Eric Bana in the brain!

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down is based upon and around the Operation Restore Hope and Task Force Ranger campaigns and follows members of the elite Delta Force and US Army Rangers as they participate in raids against the Somali warlords in and around Mogadishu. The demo offers team deathmatch mode on one multi-player level with day and night settings, called "City Limits," that's playable over NovaWorld and LAN.



Requires: P2-500 128 MB RAM 32MB Videocard 400MB HDD

HAEGEMONIA

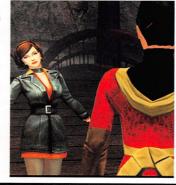
Jere really really likes it a lot, will you?

Discover a powerful space-opera and RTS game created by the developers of the award-winning Imperium Galactica 1 and 2, which will allow you to break unreached grounds of gameplay. Never before have I come across a game whose visuals are so superbly detailed or has so much trouble spelling its own name. The modelling and atmospheric effects are paramount. The name of the game has an 'a' in its own interface yet the Web site leaves it out. I think it's one of those either or things with the funny Latin 'ae' diphthong-digraph-ligature option. The gameplay takes a little while to get used to but once you've got that nailed you'll love it. The demo allows you to play part in a mission to intercept illegal traders before they make it to the Jupiter outpost stations.

NOLF2 (Official Demo)

Now even chunkier!

The Ohio teaser from last month was deemed so successful that the developers thought they'd spoil us all by giving us a new demo. Woohoo! For those who don't know, NOLF 2 is the sequel to the 2000 Action Game of the Year. It's a humorous story-driven first-person shooter featuring the beautiful but deadly UNITY operative Cate Archer. See and hear (Oh, that voice!) more of Cate and get to sample another outfit or two in this mega-sized official demo. Play the official No One Lives Forever 2 demo and enjoy three complete levels of totally pure gaming goodness.



THE REST OF THE CO

With so much stuff on the CD we can't possibly list it all here on two little pages. Whack either CD in your drive and browse Paul's excellent CD interface. Every item is given a detailed description including system requirements and a relevant URL for further webbased research! CD PowerPlay, it's simply the best disc in the business. Enjoy it, for it is all for you!

When I returned to the PCPF offices for the first time in seven months sporting the

recently rediscovered boots, I found the editor jamming the head of a contributor - who had allegedly failed to get his reviews in anywhere near approaching the deadline - in the bottom draw of a rusty filing cabinet, and screaming "This screenshot was captured with an unregistered version of Hypersnap DX!" once for each of the sixty useless watermarked screenshots the contributor had, I was told, eventually submitted.

A couple of other contributors who'd dropped in for what they called "the show" were slumped on the couch in front of the dedicated Quake 3 server. They waved idly to me. In a back room, the weird flickering lights and primitive grunting I had always associated with heavy Nintendo use indicated the presence of other gaming journalists, working for other magazines. One of the contributors coughed and scratched at his generous rear end. The sound of the filing cabinet slamming over and over set up a rhythm that was almost soothing.

"You!" cried the editor, catching sight of me, "Where's that Warcraft 3 playguide?"

I indicated through use of practiced signs that clearly I hadn't received the commission, that my ISP had been playing up, that my copy of Hypersnap - the ubiquitous screen capture utility used by all - wasn't working, that the PCPP FTP had been down all weekend, that I'd left voicemail messages but he (the editor) had never got back to me, before I realised that all this was nothing more than an automatic guilt reaction because in reality I hadn't had any work from PCPP since well before the actual release of Warcraft 3 anyway.

"Not you," said the editor, "that flatmate of yours." Given that my relationship with the Girl had collapsed following my return from Vegas minus the boots which had, it turned out "been the only things that made me attractive anyway", and given that I now lived alone in a damp cellar flat in a dingy and unfashionable inner west suburb with only a badly chipped PSX and a collection of rotting pornography for company, given all this I could only assume that the editor was in fact talking about my crazy ex-third flatmate, whose antics have already been well documented in these pages.

Regretfully I indicated once again with use of practiced signs that I hadn't seen my crazy exthird flatmate for several days, since his recent but surely temporary re-employment as a courier for Australia Post's new Platinum Express service. That he had agreed to do a Warcraft 3 playguide was only marginally more surprising than the fact the editor had offered it to him in the first place. My crazy ex-third flatmate had a reputation you see, one that was not unjustified.

The editor glowered at me in his particular way and with one last vengeful slam, left the contributor's head jammed in the filing cabinet and stalked away to wave the flatplan aggressively at the advertising department until they gave in and agreed to sell more ads so he

(the editor) wouldn't have to rely on the work of contributors so much to fill the magazine.

I took a breath, then looked around for another staff member. I recalled that I had dragged myself over to Redfern at this ungodly pre-noon hour to ask for my job back as a roving reporter, to be sent to the country in search

AT HOME WITH PCPP

Just another regular day in the office



of obscure out-of-the-way development houses so I could point and laugh at their pointless unsellable projects. I suddenly wondered what ever happened to Emily Smitten, the foot fetishist developing the world's first indepth power walking simulator. I wondered if I should ring her up and see if she wanted to go out for a drink sometime.

The art director was still there, but she was engaged in a massive and protracted screaming match with the deputy editor over the aesthetic viability of six pages filled with nothing but text and images of Intel's new southbridge controller. Likewise, the deputy editor was not only shouting at the art director but also shouting down the phone at some hardware distributor who was very angry at not having had their product reviewed in the magazine last issue, despite not having sent the magazine the actual product, pictures of the product, or even condescended to let the magazine know that they (the distributor) or it (the product) even existed.

It was good, I reflected, that at least some things never changed.

The editor stalked back in, through, and out another door. He still had the flatplan but now it had a lot of red scrawl all over it. I wondered if it might be blood.

"Don't mind us," called one of the other contributors, the one in the suit, "It's not like we have full time jobs at important city addresses to go to." The contributor with his head in the filing cabinet made an odd sort of gurgling sound.

Abruptly, the deputy editor jumped up and ran from the room. This set us all reeling, partly at the suddenness of it, but mostly because we'd forgotten he was 6'8" and him leaving was kind of like a small but significant portion of the planet breaking off and escaping into deep

bit, at a loss. I approached the art director, but she just snarled and dragged viciously at the cigarette she was not supposed to be smoking inside.

So I figured the best thing to do would be to play Quake 3 for about six hours and then leave. That was the way people usually got jobs around here. I set up a server with four or five Hurt Me Plenty bots and then ran about "tied for 4th place with -1" in Q3DM17 for a while until a Platinum Express Post package landed at my elbow.

My crazy ex-flatmate grinned like someone who had just narrowly escaped from something so bad that it had finally cracked the last part of his mind that had not already been cracked by a lifetime of abuse. Something involving goat's blood and things scrawled on the floor in chalk.

"What's this?" I asked, "And how did you know I was here?"

"I assumed," said he, "and it's your first assignment. You're going to Fremantle," he looked at the package again, "by road. Excuse me, I have to run."

And with a swirl of black faux-leather trenchcoat he was gone. I had barely enough time to collect my thoughts before the editor charged past, screaming and waving what appeared to be some kind of small axe. He also had a copy of a competing publishing house's Warcraft 3 playguide, the one that had inexplicably appeared on newsstands overnight with my crazy ex-third flatmate's name on it.

"You were fragged by Crash," said Quake 3. I could only concur.

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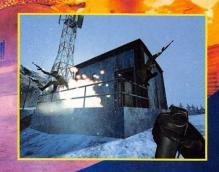


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